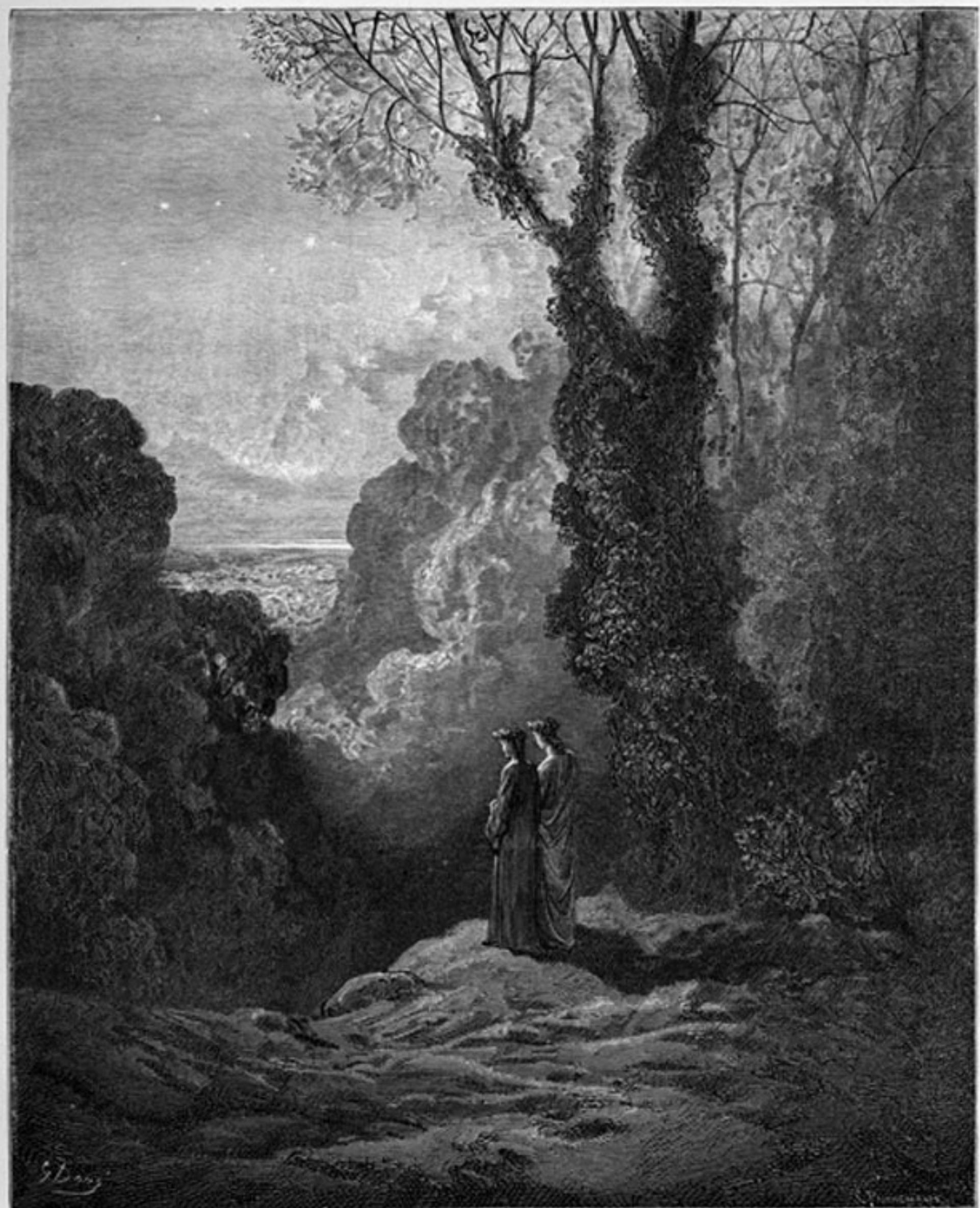


Purgatory

A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATORS -

This book is a transcript of the audio book :The Divine Comedy Trilogy: The Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise Plus a Life of Dante: by Heathcote Williams. Enchanted by the audio, we did this transcription to share with you. We hope you can forgive us for any mistakes in it, we are not professionals at this. And anybody is welcome to improve it. We also hope the author can forgive us for any mistakes in the transcription and releasing this book. It is not our intention to cause a loss to the author or the publishing company. If you have the means to do so, please buy the original CD as well. And if you like this book, please spread it to those you feel may benefit from it. The CD is available at : <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/9626342242/>

Canto I



The little vessel of my mind hoists sail and makes a course for calmer waters now, letting that cruel sea fall far behind her. Now of that second kingdom I shall sing, where human souls are purified of sin and made worthy to ascend to heaven. And since, O holy muses, I am yours, here, let my dead poetry rise again from hell's dominion and let Calliope now rise to join my song with her sweet strains whose power the magpies felt so sharply, they despaired of ever hearing pardon.

The sweet hue of oriental sapphire suffusing through the sky's unclouded face, bright and clear as far as the horizon brought pleasure to my sight again, as soon as I had left behind me that atmosphere which had so oppressed my eyes and heart.

Love's lovely planet, the comfort in love was making all the eastern heaven smile with light unveiling Pisces in her escort.

Turning to my right I looked up towards the other southern pole and saw four stars, no eyes had seen since our first parents last. All the heavens revelled in their soft light. O widowed north to be denied that sight!

When my eyes left them, I turned a little towards the northern pole from where the vain had disappeared. And discovered near me an old man, alone, whose face demanded the respect a son would owe a father. His beard was long and touched with strands of white as was his hair which tumbled to his chest in two great tresses. Rays of

sacred light from the four stars struck his face so brightly it might have been the sun reflected there.

“Who are you?” He cried shaking back his plumes “ to challenge the hidden river’s current and escape from the eternal prison. Who was your guide? What served as lantern to light your passage through the deepest night which keeps that infernal pit in darkness. Have the laws of the abyss been broken? Is heaven’s counsel newly changed to decree that you, damned, may approach these rocky slopes?”

My guide took me strongly by the arm. A glance and gesture bid me bend my knees and head. He answered “I do not journey this way on my own behalf or will, but on this man’s. A lady sent from heaven prayed my help in guiding him, still living, through the maze in which by his folly he found himself. His final hour was close approaching but a short time remained to change his ways so I was sent to him as rescuer. There was no other path to follow here. I showed him the people in perdition. Now, I intend to show him those sinners who purity themselves in your domain. Eternal edicts have not been broken, this man lives and Minos does not bind me. I dwell in the circle where the chaste eyes of your Marcia look up imploring for remembrance. Allow for her love’s sake, our passage across our seven kingdoms. If we of that circle are not too low to speak of you, I shall bear her our thanks.”

“Marcia has so pleased my eyes,” Cato replied “while I was there within the other world, any kindness she asked I

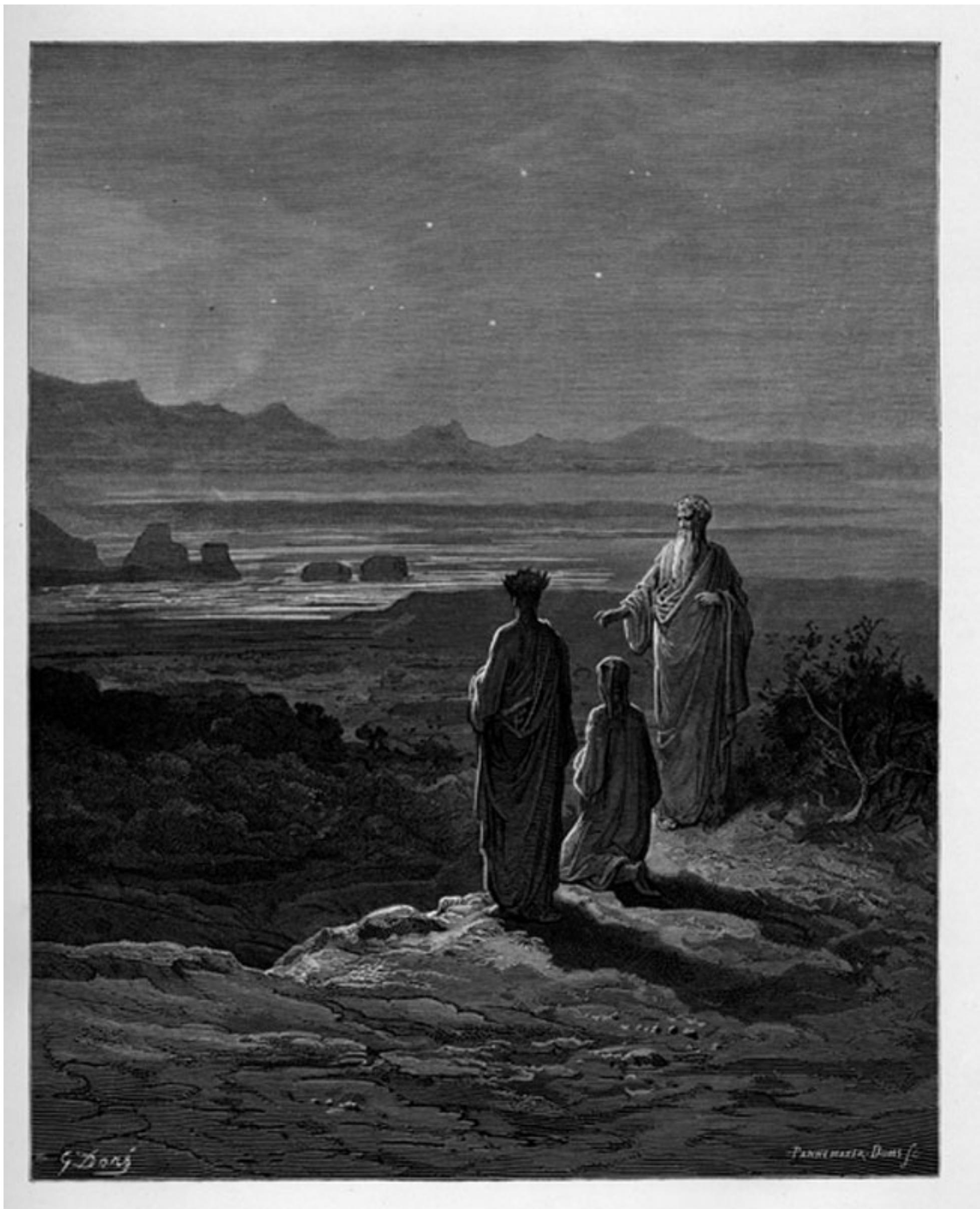
satisfied. Now she dwells beyond the evil river, she has no power to move me any longer, so heaven decreed when I rose from there. But if a Lady from Heaven moves you there is no need of any flattery. You ask in her name, it is sufficient. Go then. But first see you wind a smooth rush around his waist and bathe his face so that every trace of hell's filth is washed away. For it would not be seemly to approach the first of the heavenly ministers while infernal fogs still cloud his vision. At its base where waves break against the shore, this solitary island grows rushes, in soft and muddy ground. No other plant is rooted there. No leaf or woody stem. Only plant reeds that live by yielding. Afterwards do not come this way again. The rising sun will show the route to take."

With that he vanished. And without a word I rose. And pressing closer to my guide turned my gaze towards him and he began "Follow my footsteps and let us turn again. Along this side the plane slopes gently down to reach the island's boundaries below"

Now the dawn was conquering the morning which fled before it. In the distance there, I recognised the quivering of the sea. We made our way across that lonely plane like men who stray returning to a path who until its gained count each pace a loss.

When we came on a place where the cool shade shielded the dew against the morning sun my master spread out both hands and placed them gently on the tender grass before him. I lifted up my tear stained face and there he

washed me clean so that my true colour emerged once buried by the grime of hell. Then we arrived at that deserted shore whose waters have never yet been sailed on by any man who found dry land again. There, as pleased another, he girded me. I watched a marvel then. He plucked the reed and instantly another took its place.



Canto II



The sun was crossing the horizon now, traveling on the arc whose highest point covers Jerusalem. While equal night, always revolving in opposition, rose from the Ganges bearing Libra's scales which fall away when dark outlasts the day. And so above the shore that I had reached, fair Aurora's cheeks, youthful rose and white were mellowing with a more golden light.

We were still standing by the ocean's edge pondering on the road ahead like men who travel in their minds before their feet attempt the path. When suddenly I saw low in the West like the red glow of Mars, seen through morning mists above the ocean, a light and may I say it once again, moving over the water so swiftly no earthly flight could ever equal it. I gave my guide an enquiring glance and then looked back. Much larger than before the light shone brighter. On each side appeared a whiteness in some shape unknown to me. Beneath these two, another whiteness formed. All this time my master said not a word. But when the whiteness, first seen, became wings and he recognised the helmsmen he cried, "Bend! Down on your knees! See there, God's angel! Fold your hands! From now expect to see more. See how he spurns the use of human tools. He needs no oars no sails, only his wings to cross between such distant shores. See how his wings are pointing heaven-wards. How he cleaves the air with immortal plumes, that do no moult as mortal feathers would."

That heavenly bird growing brighter still, then drew closer in and closer until I could no longer bear the radiance and bowed my head. He steered straight for the shore, sailing

so light and quick over the waves that his ship left no ripple in its wake. Upon the stern stood celestial helmsmen, made blessedness seem inscribed on him. Forward sat a hundred souls or more, all singing with a single voice, The psalm "In exitu Israel de Aegypto!" (when Israel out of Egypt's bondage passed) making the air rejoice with every verse. He blessed them making the sign of the cross and with that they threw themselves on the shore. He departed swiftly as he came. There left on the beach the multitude of souls seemed like strangers to a place. Staring round like men who come across some novelty. The sun shot forth the day on every side and from mid heaven its blazing arrows had already chased Capricorn away, when glancing up, those souls discovered us.

"If you should know the road ahead that climbs the mountain side" they called "please do direct us." Virgil answered them "You may imagine" He said "that we are souls that know this shore. But we are strangers, pilgrims as yourselves only recently arrived before you though by a different path so tortuous that climbing this mountain will seem near play."

The souls then noticed that I drew breath. That I lived still and paled with amazement. One of these souls pressed forward, arms stretched wide to embrace me. He appears so eager, I was moved to mirror his gesture. O shades! In all but appearance, empty. I clasped my hands three times around his shape and three times brought them back against my chest. Dismay, I think, coloured my face. He

smiled and drew away as I advanced again. Gently he said that I could now desist and with that I knew who he was.

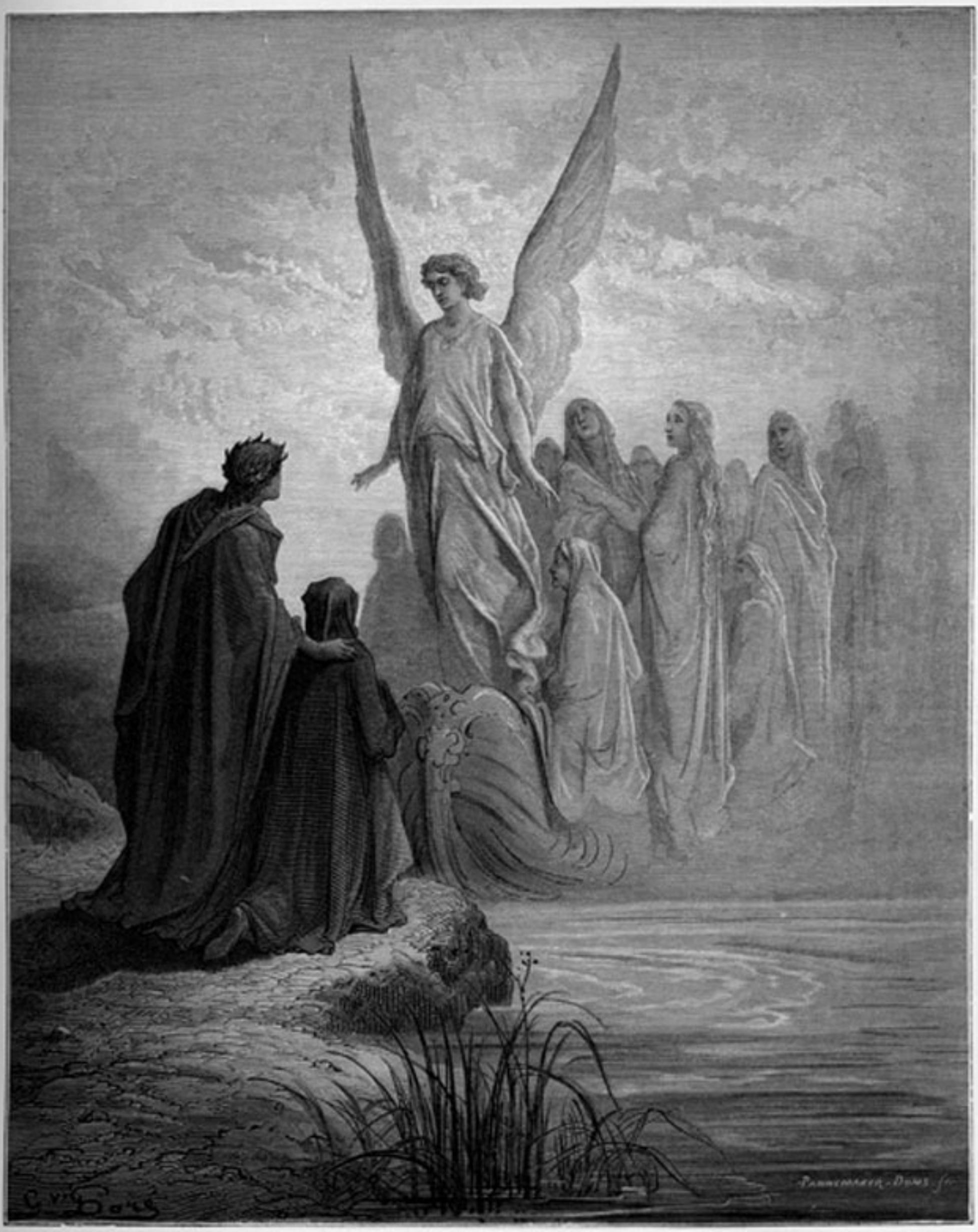
“Stay a while.” I beseeched him “Talk with me a moment. “I loved you when I wore my mortal flesh.” He said “ And I love you still without it. So I will stay. But why do you go this way? “Dear Casella, I make this journey now in the hope I may come again.” I said “But how are you deprived of so much time?” “(Sighing) I cannot complain if He who decides when to take a soul often refused me passage in his boat, for his will is just. But for the last three months most tranquilly he has been taking all who wish to cross. So when I sought the shore where salty sea and Tiber mix, he gathered me aboard. Straight back to the Tiber’s mouth he wings now to that shore where dead souls forever crowd, bar all those who sink down to Acheron.”

“If no new Lord denies the memory or practice of songs of love who brought such quiet to my restless longings once,” I said “would you sing and console my soul? It is weary from having climbed till here with my body, an arduous journey.”

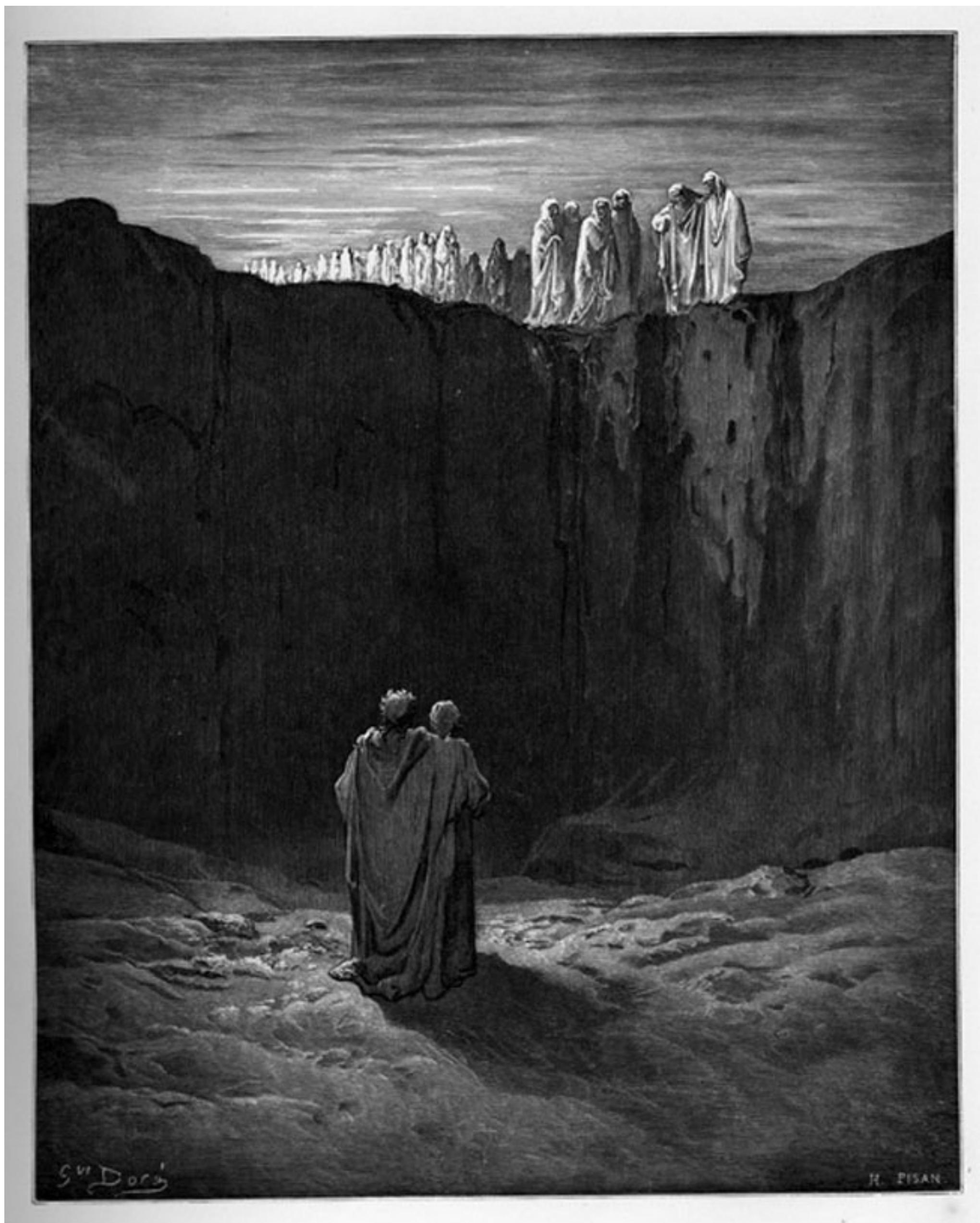
“Love the discourses to me in my mind” he then began to sing and sang so sweetly that I find its sweetness lingers in me. My gentle guide, myself and all those souls were held rapturous around the singer as if no other sound might touch our minds but as we stood, transfixed by those sweet notes, the venerable man appeared. “What’s this?” He cried “What have we here, you slugged shades. What negligence

and listless lingering. Hurry on up the mountain. Shed the scales that blind you still from God made manifest."

As when doves gathered at the feeding place forgetful of their strutting pride for grain will take to the wing as one if startled, their hunger conquered by a sudden fear, so did that new come company of souls leave the song and scattered for the mountain, like those who leap not knowing where they will land, nor were we less hasty in taking flight.



Canto III



Following their chosen path they scattered across the plane and towards the mountain, where justice probes with rightful punishments. But I drew closer to my faithful guide. Who else but he could lead my weaker steps? Who else could help me ascend the mountain? Yet he seemed somehow stung by self reproach. O pure and noble conscience, how shameful each petty fault becomes for one like you.

I set my face to that slope that rises highest reaching heavenward from the sea. Behind my back the sun was fiery red and on the ground before me my shadow, but only mine, I turned quickly afraid my guide had left me while I carried on. But he, just there beside me said to me “Why are you still uneasy? Do you think I am not here with you still, guiding you? The body with which I cast a shadow lies buried where it is evening now. Naples has it. Taken from Brundisi. So if no shadow falls in front of me do not be more amazed than at the spheres which do not obstruct one another’s rays. Body is here, though without substance, succumbed to mortal torments such as heat and cold. How, the omnipotent does not reveal. It is foolish to suppose human minds can ever understand the infinite that encompasses three persons in one. Were we humans possessed all reason what need for Mary to have born a son? Recall the fruitless yearning of those shades who with reason could would have been content. But have instead, as their lot, endless pain. I speak of Aristotle and Plato and many others.”

Then falling silent he bowed his head and walked on in sorrow. By this time we had gained the mountain's base. A slope too steep for even agile legs, the most desolate jagged pathway from Turbia to Lerici would seem an easy flight of stairs compared to this.

My master halted. "Now" He asked "Who knows on which side the slope descends more gently? So that even without wings we can climb?"

While he stood thinking eyes upon the ground considering which was the way to take and I surveyed the wall of rock above, a crowd of souls came along the cliff side. Approaching from my left but so slowly they did not seem to draw any nearer.

"Master" I said "Look there over that way. Here a spirit may yet advise us if you have not yet found the path yourself."

He looked up and with some relief replied "Since they move so slow let us go to them and be steadfast in hope my gentle son." We were a good sling-man shot away from them, even having walked a thousand paces, when suddenly they huddled together and would not move, pressing against the cliff, standing there, staring, like men afraid.

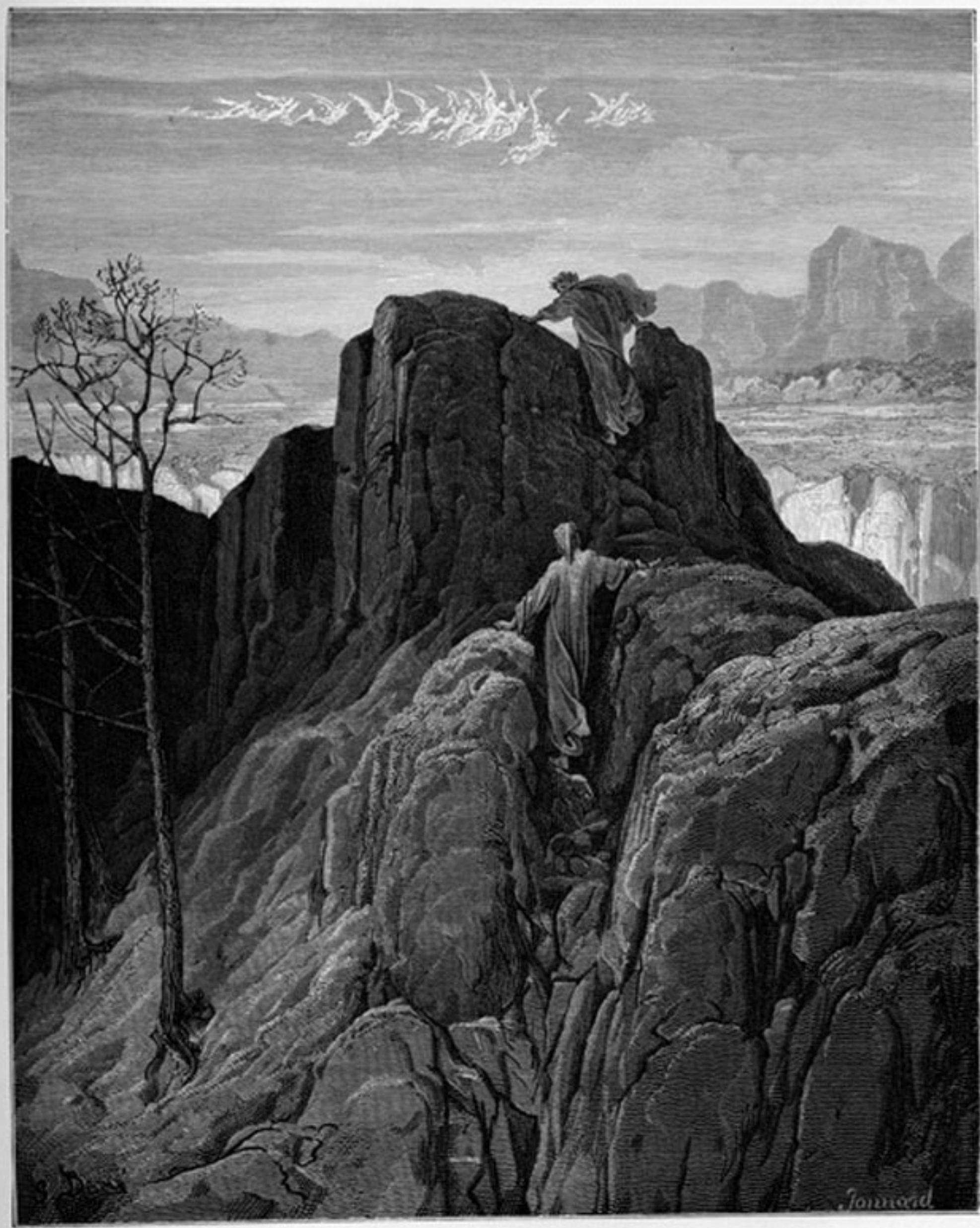
"Chosen souls who finished well!" said Virgil "By that peace I believe awaits you all tell us please where it slopes

enough to climb? For wasting time irks more the more one knows.”

At that, as sheep will leave the fold, first one then two then three before the rest follow hesitantly, eyes and muzzles lowered, the others doing what the first sheep does without knowing why, simple and quiet, huddling close behind it if it should halt. So then I saw the leaders of that flock of chosen souls take their first steps towards us, their eyes modest, their movements dignified. But when the souls in front saw the sunlight to my right was broken by my shadow stretching to the cliff they stopped and drew back and all the others who came after them halted too without knowing why they did so. “Without you asking me I would tell you. This is a human body before you that divides the sunlight above the ground. Do not wonder at it but be assured not without the power that comes from heaven is he seeking to scale this barrier.” So said my master and the crowd replied “Turn around!” gesturing in our direction with the back of their hands. “Walk by that way. Whoever you may be” one soul began “, as you walk on, look back and ask yourself if you have ever seen me before now.” I turned around and eyed him steadily. Blond and beautiful, with noble features. But for one eyebrow split by a sword stroke. When I humbly confessed I never had he said “Look now” and pointed to a wound on his chest. Then smilingly told me “I am Manfred, the grandson of empress Costanza. I pray if you reach the world once again go to my lovely daughter, mother of Sicily's king and Aragon's. Tell her this. Whatever the rumours are, after my human form had been shattered by

these two fatal blows I gave myself up weeping to him who willingly forgives and though my sins were truly horrible infinite mercy stretches out its arms to embrace every man who seeks it out. Men are not so damned by malediction that love everlasting cannot return as long as hope keeps it alive and green though truly who dies spurning the holy church though he seeks repentance at the very end must wait on this shore thirty times the span that he lived in his presumptuousness unless prayers abridge the term decreed. See if you can help and make me happy by telling good constants my soul is here and why delay is decreed for me. Those here through those beyond may progress more quickly.”

Canto IV



When by sensation of delight or pain any one of our faculties is seized the soul gives itself to that single sense seeming inattentive to the others which refutes the error that considers more than one soul burns within our body. And thus it is that when we see or hear a thing that captures the soul's attention we become unaware of passing time. The faculty that notes the course of time is not a sense that captures all the mind. That first has no strength when the later binds, this I find as true from experience.

The sun had risen fifty full degrees when at a point long away the band cried out with one voice "Here is what you seek". I had been unconscious of the fact while listening and marvelling to that soul.

The farmer when the grapes are darkening will take a small forkful of thorns to close a wider gap in his hedge than the hole through which we, my guide and I alone, then ascended when the crowd of souls had passed. Squeezed tight between the sides of fissured rock we struggled upwards using hands and feet until at last we reached the topmost part of that embankment and an open slope.

"Master," I said "where must we go from here?" "Not back a step" He said to me "but on, up the mountain, keep close beside me now until we find a wiser guide than I."

The peak rose higher than the eye could see, the slope was even steeper than a line drawn from mid quadrant to the

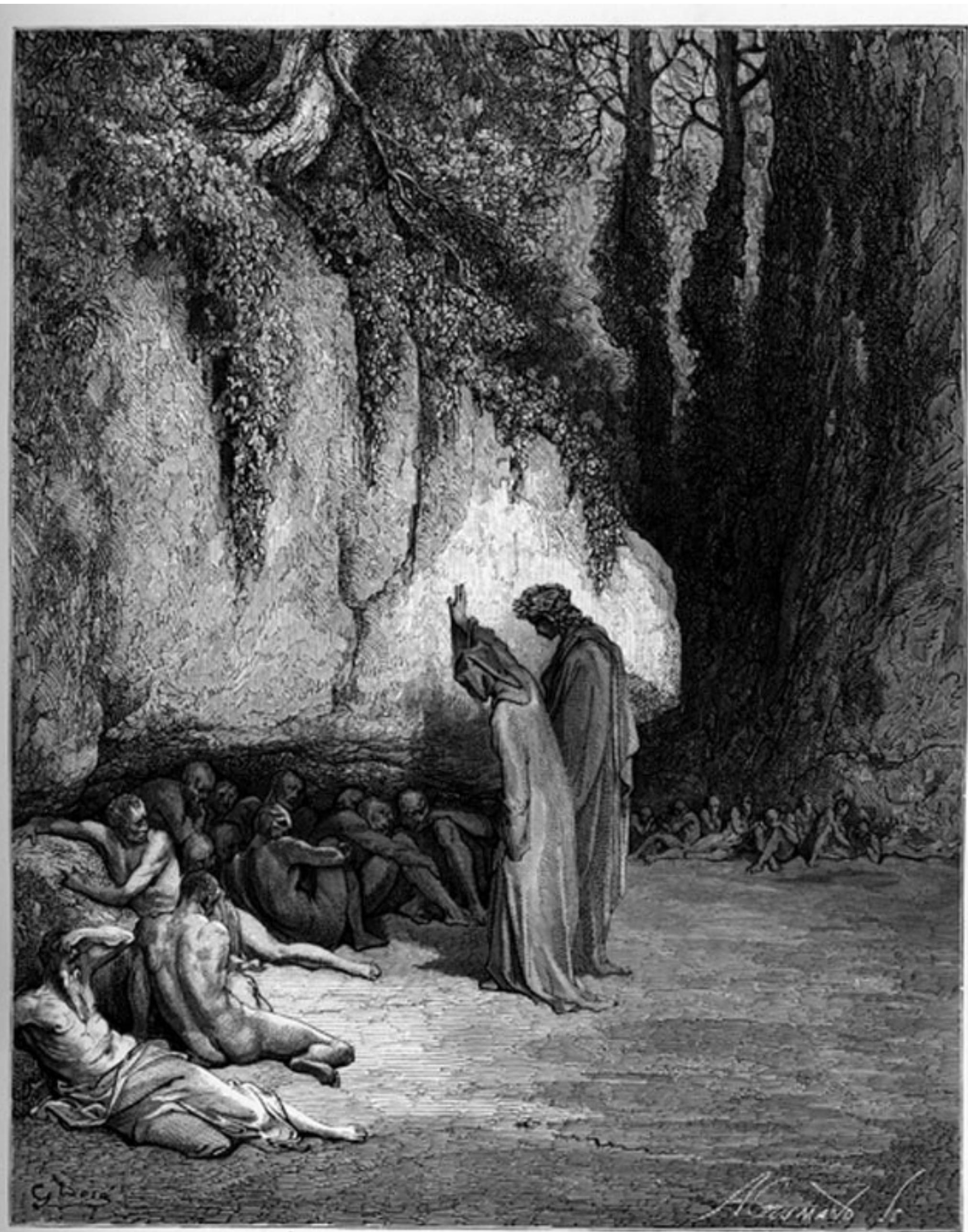
centre point. When I made my plea I was exhausted. “Turn around and look O gentle Father!, you will lose me unless you slow the pace.” “My son” he said “pull yourself just that far” pointing out a terrace further up. We circled right around the mountain side. His words were such a spur I forced myself scrambling up on hands and knees behind him until the terrace was beneath my feet. Here we sat down. He and I together. Facing towards the East from where we had come. Happily looking back on what we had climbed.

He said to me “This mountain is such that the lower slopes are hard to climb but as we rise the path turns easier and when the slope becomes as gentle as drifting with the current in a boat the journey will be almost run for you. Then you may hope for rest from exertion. I say no more. I knew this as the truth.”

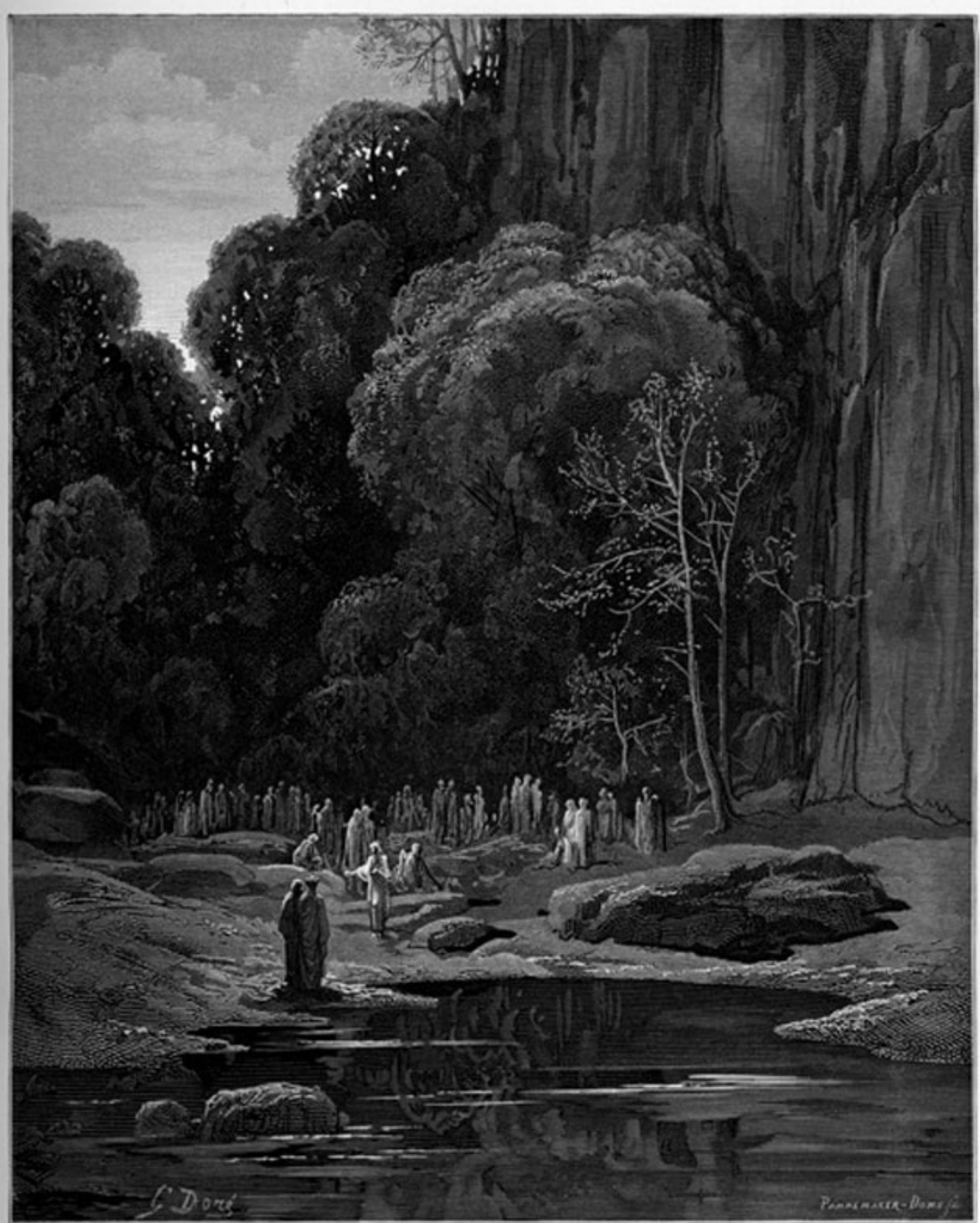
His words were barely spoken when a voice nearby was heard to say “O...may well be before then, you will have need to sit” At that sound both of us turned around and we saw to the left a massive rock, neither he nor I had noticed until then. We went toward it and saw some people logging in the shade the boulder offered as men beset by idleness will rest. One of these who seemed to me exhausted was sitting with his arms around his knees and his head bowed down resting between them. “Look there” I said “ He is not more languid than if Sloth herself were sister to him” Then more attentive he turned towards us raising his head the rest upon his knee and said “Hmmm go on then. Climb if you are so lively”. I knew him then

and all my exertions and even now still quickened my breathing did not prevent me going over there. His lazy movements and short words combined to raise smile to my lips so I said “Hah, from now on Belacqua I need not grief for you but tell me why do you sit here in this place? You waiting around for an escort or have you fallen into your old ways?” “Aa...ha..brother” he said “what’s the good in climbing? God’s angel, the guardian of the gate, would not let me pass through for penitence. The heavens must revolve as many times as they passed by me while I was living. Since I delayed making my peace until the end, unless before then am helped in prayer, offered that is from a heart filled with grace, Ahh... other prayers are worthless, not heard above.”

But climbing the poet now moved ahead “It’s time!” he said “The sun has reached its peak above the ocean night already stands with one dark foot upon Morocco sands.”



Canto V



I had already parted from the souls following in the footsteps of my guide when one shade pointed at me crying out “Look at the one who climbs behind the first. See on his left no ray of Sun shines through and surely he walks like one still living.” Hearing these words I turned to see the shades staring at me in amazement and me alone under the broken light. “What is it that has your interest so caught that you have slacken off the pace? Why should you care if they are whispering? Keep close by me and let the spirits talk. Be like a tower of stone whose summit is unmoved whatever the winds that may blast. The man who allows thought to topple thought weakens his mind and wanders from his goal.” What could my reply be other than to say “I am coming!”, my face coloured by that hue that makes a man deserve to be pardoned.

Meanwhile along the slope crossing ahead some people appeared singing Miserere. Chanting alternately verse by verse. But when they noticed that the rays of light had no passage through me their chanting stopped changing to a drawn out and breathless “Ohh..” Then two of them serving as messengers came running to meet us imploring “Please would you say something of who you are?” My master answered them “Be on your way. And bear this message to those who sent you. This man’s body is truly made of flesh. If they stayed because they saw his shadow let them give him honour. He may help them.”

I knew saw a flaming meteor rend clear skies at night nor the setting Sun split August clouds with such rapidity as those two rushed back to their group of souls. Then together they wheeled and rushed at us almost like cavalry

on a loose reign. “All these souls pressing on us” said my guide “will each have his plea. Listen but don't stop.”

“So...climbing towards bliss?” they clamoured “, still clothed in the body that you were born with. Pause a while! Such amongst us a face you might recognise to carry back news. Why do you hurry on? Why don't you wait? We are all souls whose death was violent. All sinners until those final moments when light from heaven led understanding. We left our lives penitent and pardoned, at peace with God and is still with longing to see His holy face!”

I said to them “For all I look I recognise no one. But souls born to goodness if I can please tell me and by that peace which I search from world to world in the steps of a guide so great as this, I will surely do so”

One began “We have faith without your oath. Your word is good unless lack of power obstructs your will , so speaking for myself before the others hear I beseech you should you ever travel through the country between Romana and the Rome of Charles, be good to me. Ask the souls in Farno to pray on my behalf that I may soon begin to cleanse away my heaven sins.”

Another soul spoke then “Let your desire that draws you up the mountain be fulfilled and for pity's sake help ease my longing. I am Bon Conti. I was from Monte Felchro. Giovanni neglects me with the rest. So ashamed inside I walk with these shades.”

I said to him “What violence or chance swept you so far from Campoldino’s field that no one ever found your burial place?”

He said “Ah..below the Casentino runs a stream the Archean rising in the Apinine’s above the hermitage. To the place where the stream changes its name I came on foot, bleeding across the plane, my that an open would, I went blind there. The power of speech left me. So I died. But as I died I murmured Mayr’s name. Then flesh alone remained. Now hear the truth. Tell the living. God’s Angel took me up but hell’s fiend cried out ‘ You from heaven! You deny me what is mine! Just one tear lets you take away his immortal part but for his body I have different plans’ You know how vapour gathers int he air and avert to rain as it climbs and cools. His evil will bent on being evil he joined with intellect. With that power in his nature he stirred up wind and mist with the close of day the valley was filled form Paratomano unto the great ridge with fog. The skies were loaded with moisture. Then saturated air returned to rain and what the salted ground could not receive gully’s gathered into rushing torrents rushing relentless to the royal river. The angry Arkeian found my body at his mouth and spatted in the honour losing the cross my arms had formed in final agony across my chest. Down its riverbed along its banks it rolled me and would me in shroud of silt.”

“Please when you have regained the world once more and found your ease when this journey has run said a third soul following the second may you remember me. I am

Pear. Seanna made me. Marimba unmade me. As well he knows who swore his love to me and pledging faith gave me his marriage ring."



Canto VI

When the game of dice is down and over, disconsolate, the loser lingers on replaying all his throws sadly wiser. The crowd surrounds the winner as he leaves, one goes before him, one tugs at his back. At his side, one reminds him of his friends. Listening to them all, he presses on, and when he gives in a little, these desist and offers some protection from the crush. I was that man, surrounded by the pack turning first here and then there and making promises just to escape their clutches. When I was free from all those shades whose prayers that others pray for them to help them hardly on their way to bliss I said “It seems to me that you, my light, deny quite expressly in your verses that prayer can bend the law of heaven yet these souls ask precisely for such prayers. Does this mean then that their hope is all in vain or have I misunderstood what I read?”

And he said “What I wrote is plain enough if you bring your wit to bear upon it yet their hopes are not simple delusion. Divine high justice would not be brought low because the fire of love accomplishes in an instant the fulfilment of the debt these penitent souls need to satisfy. Where I said that prayers couldn't mend the fault of those who dwell here, I spoke of prayers that will not find a pathway unto God, but do not try to solve this problem now. Wait for the words that She will say to you. She, the light between truth and intellect. You understand me. I mean Beatrice. She will appear upon the mountain peak and you shall see Her, smiling in Her bliss.” I said “Master, let us press on ahead. I am already less weary than I was

and see the mountain casts a shadow now." "As long as the daylight lasts we shall climb and as far as possible." He said "But not so quickly as you are thinking. Before you reach the peak you will see the sun emerge. Now he hides behind the mountain and prevents you casting any shadow. But see that spirit sitting all alone, he will show us the fastest route to take"

We went over to him. O Lombard soul, what haughty and disdainful stance you took and in your stare what gravity and pride. He did not say a word but let us come watching us like a lion at rest, intent. Virgil, approaching nonetheless, asked him would he show us the best way to ascend. The soul made no answer to his request, asking us instead what our country was and who we might be. My guide responded "Mantua". At which the shade who had been until then so withdrawn jumped to his feet saying "Mantuan!, I am Sordello of your birth place." And the two shades embraced. O abject Italy, the home of grief! You ship, without a helmsman on wild seas! queen of provinces, no, of brothel!

How quick that noble spirit responded. His city's name alone enough for him to greet his fellow citizen with warmth. While now none living in your boundaries know any break from war and man wounds man, even though the same walls and mote guard them. Such along your shores wretched Italy and look to your very heart! Can you find any part of you that delights in peace? What matter if Justinian repaired the bridle if the saddle is empty. Indeed without him the same would be less. You priests! If you

remembered what God wished, you would attend to things of holiness, rightly letting Caesar take the saddle.

How the beast turns fierce without the spurs of her rider to keep her going straight, since your hands dare to snatch away the reigns. For the towns of Italy burst with tyrants, each rogue that raises fashions ugly head, is soon a new Marcellus to his sect. O my Florence, you may rejoice indeed that this digression has left you exempt. Thank your striving citizenry for that. Some have justice in their hearts thinking before they let their judgments leave the bow. But your people keep it handy, on their lips. Some refuse the weight of public service. But your people do not wait to be asked, shouting at eagerly “I will take it on!” Be happy, have you not good reason to? Have you not your riches, peace and wisdom? I speak the truth and the facts prove me right.

Canto VII



When joyful and gracious welcomes had been repeated three or four times, Sordello, drawing back a pace, asked “Who are you?” “My bones were buried by Octavian before those souls worthy of ascending to God have been guided to this mountain. I am Virgil, deprived of heaven’s light through no other fault than lack of faith.” This was the answer my guide gave that shade. As one who suddenly sees before him something marvellous will believe then doubts and says “It is! No! It cannot be!”, so Sordello seemed. Then he bowed his head to Virgil reverently and turning embraced him as a vassal would his lord. “Glory of the Latins! Eternal honour to my Mantua, through whom our tongue was revealed in glory. If you are from hell tell me from what cloister?”

“Through every circle of that doleful realm I travelled.” He said “Heavenly power showed me this road and by that I journey. Not what I did, but what I failed to do deprived me of the Sun that you desire, which I was too late in recognising. Below there is a place saddened not by torment but shadow. There, no shrieks of pain are heard only laments of hopeless sighs. I dwell with the souls of innocent infants, those whom death had savaged before the sin that they were born with could be washed away. I dwell there with those souls who were not clothed in the three holy virtues but who knew and followed all the others without sin. But if you are allowed and if you know direct us to the quickest path that leads to where purgatory truly begins”.

“Here we had assigned no fixed spot.” He said “ but are free to roam and climb the mountain. I will be your guide as far as I am allowed. But see, the day is drawing to a close By night ascending is forbidden us. We ought to find some pleasant place to rest. Near here a group of souls are set apart. I shall take you to them if you agree. You will delight I think in meeting them.”

“How is that?” said my guide “The souls at night would they be stopped or find they could not move?”

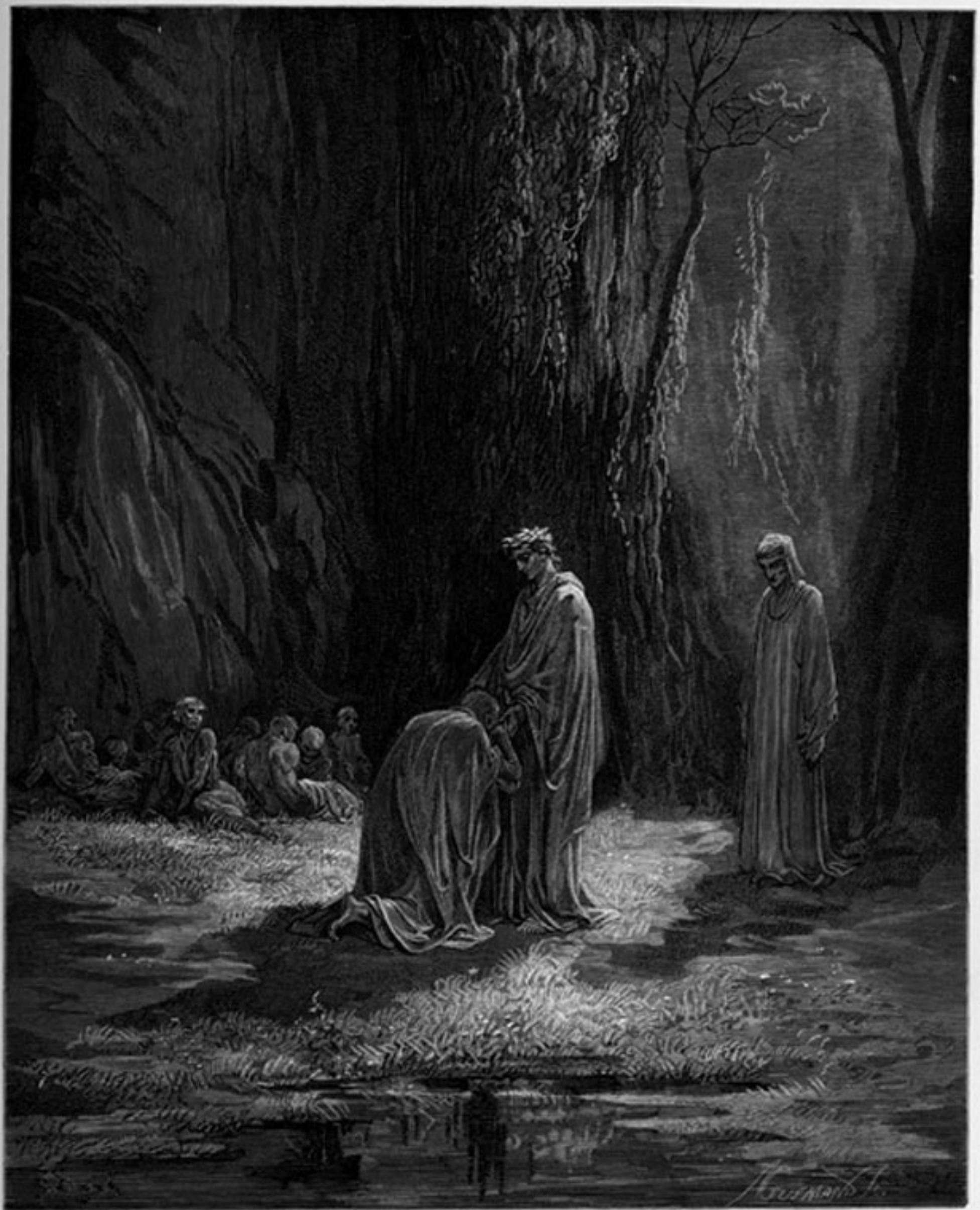
“Look” good Sordello’s finger traced the line along the ground. “After sunset” he said “you could not move a step beyond this mark. Nothing else prevents our climb onward except the night. The chance dies not desire. One may in darkness descend the mountain and wander the lower slopes aimlessly as long as the horizon blocks the day”

My guide wondering at what he had heard answered “Lead us then to the place where as you say we might find delight in our night’s delay” We moved off but had not gone very far when I noticed a hollow in the slope. A mountain valley just as in our world. The soul spoke “Will wait for the new day there. Where the mountain slope folds into a lap.”

A winding undulating path led us to a point by the hollow where the edge that bordered it had dropped away by half. Gold, fine silver, white lead, cochineal and indian wood, glowing and brightly cut emerald at the moment it is split, would all be far surpassed within that fold by the bright

colours of grass and flowers. And nature had not only painted there, from a sweetness of a thousand odours had fused one, unknown, indefinable. Then I heard “*Salve Regina*” sung by groups of souls sat on the grass and flowers. Until then hidden by the valley’s rim.

“Before the sun has sunk down to its nest” said our Mantuan guide “do not ask me to lead you to where those souls are singing. From this bank you are more able to survey their features and their deeds than down below. He, the one sitting highest, with the air of having left undone things he ought not and who does not join the rest in singing was emperor Rudolf who could have healed the wounds that were the death of Italy but another later must restore her. That snub nose man seeming close in council with his friend there with the kindly features dishonoured the lily and died in flight. See he beats his breast while that other shade cradles his head. To France’s plague they are father and father-in-law they know his vicious and lewd life, hence their grief. That other robust soul, singing int one there with the one who has the handsome nose was girded with the call of every virtue. If only the young man who sits behind had lived to rule a little longer, valour would have flowed us from jug to cup, not something to say of his successes. His realms now belong to James and Frederick. Neither inherited his best heritage. And see Henry of England sitting there alone. This king who led the simple life begat much better fortune than his tree. But the one sitting farther down than these and looking up is William, Marquise whose war with Alexandria has since made Monferrat and Canavese weep.”



Canto VIII



It was the hour when a sailor's thoughts on the first day out, turn longing homeward. When their hearts yearn for friends they left behind. The hour that strikes the novice pilgrim with the blow of love if in the distance he catches the tolling of a bell that seems to him to mourn the dying day. When I grew intent, no longer on speech but on the soul who stood and raised a hand requesting quiet. He joined his palms and lifting them, fixed his gaze on the East to say to God "All else is vanity". Then from his lips fell "Te lucis ante" so devout, so sweet that the melody took me beyond any sense of myself. The rest, so sweetly with joyful jest, then joined with him in singing the hymn entire, raising their eyes to the heavenly spheres.

Then that noble host of souls stood quiet and looking to heaven grew expectant, pale and humble and I saw from on high two Angels descending with flaming swords which were blunted and broken short at the end. Their raiment green as new born leaves are green, pillared out behind them fanned by green wings. One alighted a little above us while the other stood on the further bank. Between them was the company of souls. My eyes made out their golden hair with ease but their faces dazzled me. My sight was overwhelmed by excess, like any sense.

"From Mary's bosom they come, the sentries, guards against the serpent" said Sordello "Now the light has failed it will appear soon."

Not knowing from which way the snake might come, I pressed in close to shoulders I could trust turning cold

with fear. Then Sordello said “We can join the noble shades below now and they will be pleased to see you, I know.”

I had not taken three steps when I saw a shade peer at me as if he knew me. The hour had come when the air grows dark. But it was not so dim we could not see. Now closer, what distance had denied us. What joy was mine then, noble judge Nino to see you there and not among the damned. There was no friendly greeting left unsaid. He asked me then “How long is it my friend, since you sped across the endless waters and came here to the foot of the mountain?”

“I came this morning from the place of shame” I said “still with my first life but I hope this path will lead me to gain the other.”

When Nino and Sordello heard these words they both shrank back bewildered and amazed. My eyes returned then to heaven’s treasures, to where the stars move at their slowest pace, just as spokes too closer to the axle. My guide spoke “My son, what do you stare at?” “Those three brilliant torches” I replied “lighting up the southern pole with their glow” He said to me “Those four bright stars you saw this morning are low now beneath the hill. These have risen to take their place.”

As Virgil spoke Sordello clutched him. “See, there, the adversary!” and pointed.

At the unguarded edge of the valley moved a serpent perhaps one similar to that which offered Eve the bitter fruit. The vicious streak slid through grass and flowers pausing from time to time to turn its head and lick its back like any premium beast. I never saw so I cannot say quite how the blessed hawks of heaven took flight but I saw both of them in motion clearly. Hearing the green wings cleaning through the air, the serpent fled and the angels wheeled around and each flew back to his allotted post.

The shade who had drawn close when Nino called kept his eyes on me during the attack. “So may the lantern that leads you upwards find in your will the wax necessary to take you to the enamelled summit.” He began “If you have recent tidings of Valdimagra tell them to me. I once was mighty there. Currado Malaspina was my name. Not the elder though I spring from him. Here the love I bore my own I purify”

“I never visited the lands you ruled” I answered “But can there be anywhere in all Europe they are without renown. Such fame does honour to your family and proclaims its lords and lands loudly even to one who has yet to journey there.” to which he said “You should leave now, for within the bed beneath the rams four feet the sun will not rest the seventh time before your kind speech shall be fixed to your brain with stouter nails and truer than the talk of men provides unless the course of divine judgment fails”



Canto IX



The moon, the concubine of old Tithonus abandoning the arms of her sweet lover grew white upon the eastern balcony. Facing her, glittering with precious gems the heavens set the shape of that cold beast which stings men with its tail. And where we were within the valley of the hourly steps that night ascends, too had been climbed. And now for the third step night's wings inclined. Then I, who had something of Adam in me still, lay down on the grass where all five of us were seated and let sleep overwhelm me. Close to dawn at the hour when the swallow begins her melancholy songs perhaps remembering her ancient sufferings, our mind, less a prisoner of its cares and free to wander farther from the flesh turns almost prophetic in its visions.

Dreaming, I seemed to see an eagle poised with golden feathers hanging in the sky on outstretched wings waiting ready to swoop. Is this the only place the eagle hunts? I wondered to myself. His talents scorn perhaps to take up any prey elsewhere. Then it seemed to me that he swooped wheeling slightly terrible as a thunderbolt and struck snatching me to the sphere of fire and there I felt he and I were burning from such an imagined blaze that my sleep was broken. And I woke up.

Beside me was my comfort, he alone. By now it was day. The Sun two hours high. I turned and saw the sea before my eyes. "Have no fear, take heart." my leader said "We are well on our way, hold nothing back, press on with all the courage you possess, you have arrived at purgatory now. See the rampart wall that enclose it and there see the bridge where the gate is found. Before the dawn that

ushers in the day while the soul was sleeping in your body, walking on the flowers of that valley, appeared a Lady. ‘I am Lucia, let me take this man who lies sleeping here that I may help speed him on his journey’ When the light came She took you. I followed. Sordello stayed there and the other noble spirits. Before she set you down Her lovely eyes showed me the path to the open entrance. Then She left us and your sleep went with Her.”

Just like a worried man who reassured exchanges all his fears for confidence once the truth has been revealed, so was I. And when my guide saw me released from care he went with me following behind him along the bank up towards the heights, drawing closer to the place that before I thought was only a cleft in the rock. I made out a gate. And leading to it, three steps. Each one of a different colour. Sat on the highest step, as yet silent, was a guardian. I looked up slowly at him but more directly but dropped my gaze. His radiant face was too splendid for me. And in his hand he held a naked sword, so dazzling with the reflected rays that each time I tried to see, I looked away.

“Speak now, from where you stand!” He said to us “What is it that you seek and where is your guide. Watch your next pace, may be dearly bold!”

My master spoke “A Heavenly Lady acquainted with these things came and told us ‘Behold the gate, here is where you enter.’”

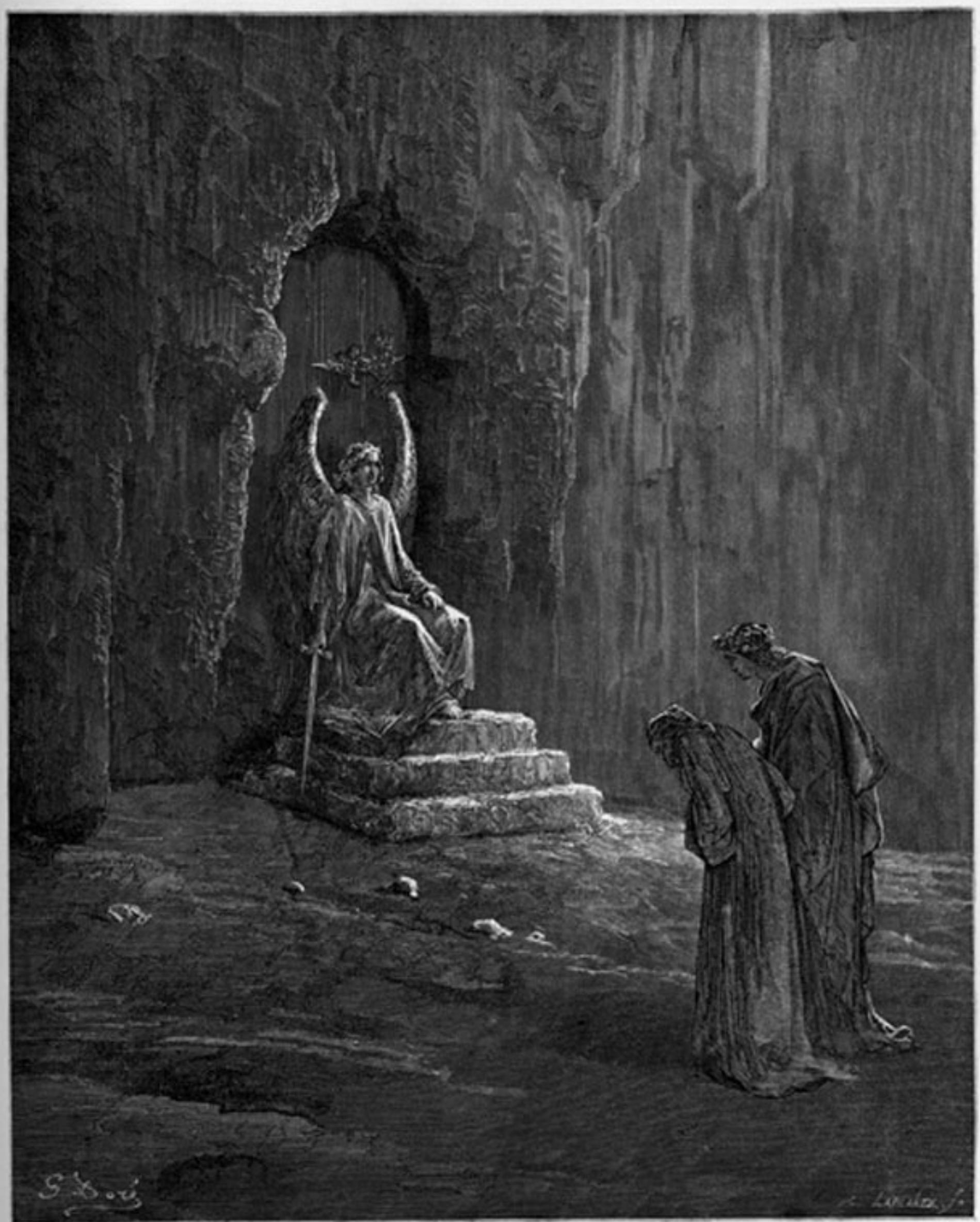
“And may your steps to bliss be sped by Her” replied the courteous keeper of the gate. “Come forward then, ascend our stairs safely.”

We reached the steps. The first was white marble like a looking glass so polished and clear I was reflected as I seemed in life. The second step, made out of crumbling rock, was roughly textured scorched and cracked across its length and breadth darker than deep purple. The third more massive appeared a fiery porphyry red and spurting blood from veins. His feet on this upper step. God’s Angel sat on a thresholds of Adamantine. My master had me ascend these three steps. “Now” he said “humbly ask him to unlock the gate.” And I obeyed. I there myself devoutly at his holy feet and prayed “Would you not open the door for mercy?” But first I beat upon my breast three times. Then he traced the letter P seven times on my forehead with his sword point. “Within” he said “Be sure to heal these scars of sin.”

Ashes or earth dug out in dry would share the colour of his robe. From beneath which he drew two keys. One silver and one gold. The white key first then second the yellow he tried and with that the lock responded. “When either one of these keys fail to turn, or turning creates uneasy in the lock” he said “the entrance does not swing open. One is more precious, but the other needs more art and skill before it will unlock for it is the key that looses the knot. “

At last he pushed at the sacred entrance. “Enter but be warned.” he said “Have no doubt. One backward glance and be cast out again!”

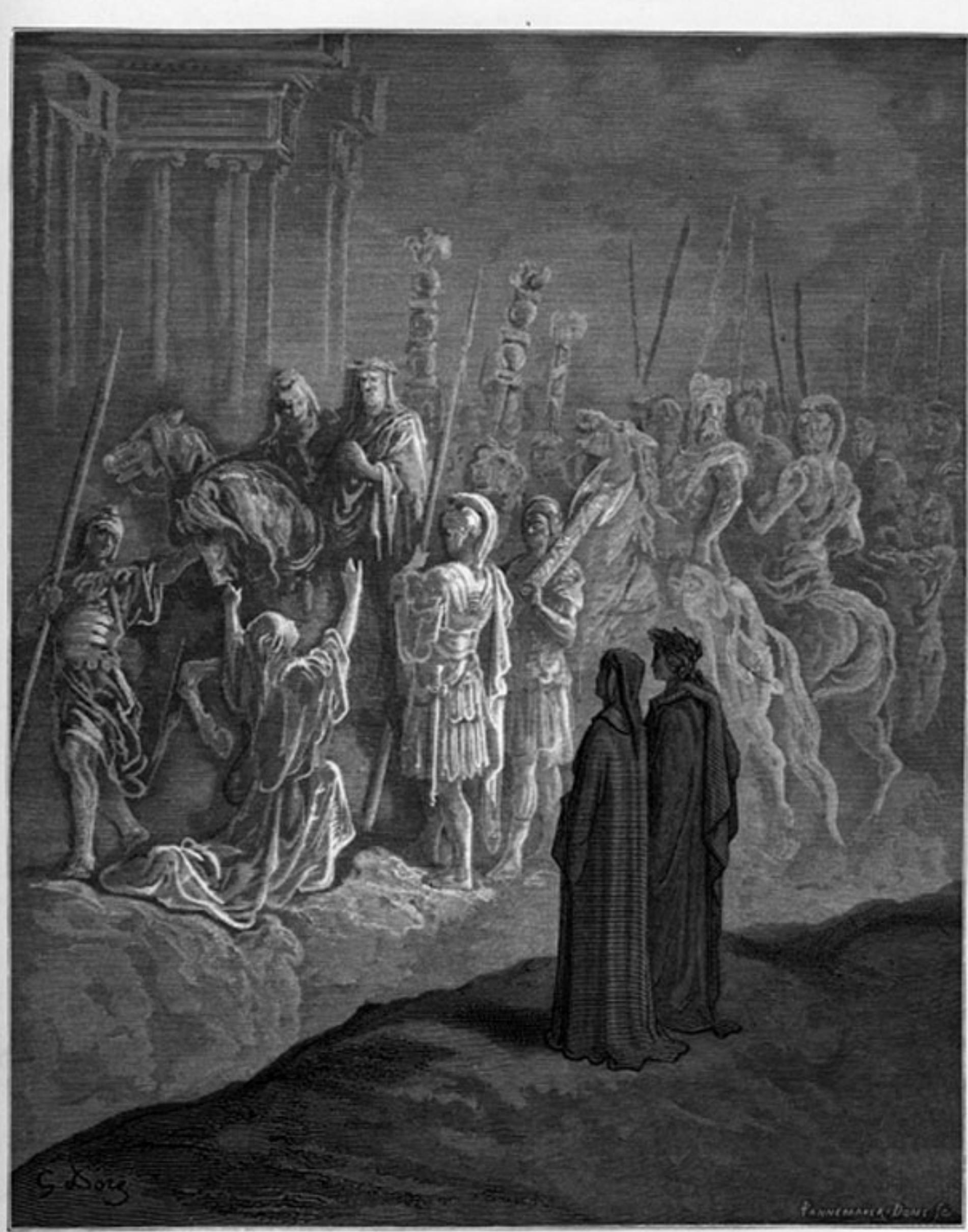
As the door swung wide resounding I turned attentive for it seemed to me I heard gentle music mingling with the chorus singing the words “Te Deum laudamus”. And what I heard was as the sound of people singing while the organ plays. When other words are clear and now are lost.



S. Dore

J. L. Gurney, Jr.

Canto X



When we had passed the threshold of that gate so seldom used because man's crooked love so often makes the crooked way seem straight, I heard a great clang. I knew it shut. Had I turned then and looked back, how could such a fault of mine had ever been excused. We climbed through cleft rock and the longer path which seemed to sway back and forth just the way a wave swells and then folds back and swells again. "We must use our wits here as the path wears" explained my guide "keeping form the rock wall."

Our steps were made so small and hesitant that the moon declining had reached its bed before it squeezed through the needle's eye then we were free. Once more on the mountain where the slope retreated to make a ledge more lonelier than a desert path. We stopped, I tired, we both uncertain of the way. From the edge hanging over the abyss to where the cliff face soared up at it again was space for three men's bodies lying down. As far as I could the left or right, the terrace did not vary in its width. Then before our feet had advanced the step I realised the inner cliff face, which rising sheer offered no means to climb, was pure white flawless marble. And adorned with carvings so accurate not only Polycletus but nature might feel shame. The angel who brought it to earth the message of peace the weeping years sought so long, setting fee the ancient ban of heaven appeared before us carved with such effect he did not seem to be a mute image. One could have sworn he was saying "Ave;" for she who turned the key unlocking the highest love was there in effigy and her carving showed

in her attitude the words “Ecce ancilla Dei” just as clear as the figure impressed now wax.

“Your mind must not dwell on one part only,” said my gentle guide who stood on that side where man’s heart is placed. So I turned and looked past Mary’s figure to the point where he who urged me now stood. Another story was set into the rock. I moved past him and drew close so the scene was more distinct. There, carved into the same marble I saw the cart and oxen with the sacred ark. A warning to fear office not our trust. In front of it moved seven different choirs that made two senses speak, one saying “No,” the other saying “Yes, they truly sing.” Ahead, the humble Psalmist robes girt up danced in front of the holy vessel showing himself both more and less the king. Facing shown at a great palace window, Michael watched, full of scorn and suffering. Looking closer at another carving shining bright white I moved beyond her face. As I stood delightedly surveying these images of fine humility whose craftsmen made them infinitely dear, the poet whispered “Look there, approaching with slow steps, a crowd of souls on this side. They will direct us to the higher stairs”. My eyes always intent to find new signs were not slow in turning to him. Here though I would not have another deflected from good resolve by hearing how God’s will would make us pay the debt we owe to him. Heed not the form of punishment described but consider what follows. At worst it cannot last beyond the final judgement.

“Master what I see moving toward us do not appear like shades to me. My sight is confused. I can’t tell what is there.” I said.

He replied “Their grievous state of torment from whatever cause bends them to the ground. At first I was unsure of what I saw, but look carefully and disentangle what’s beneath those boulders. You can see how each one beats his breast and sighs repentant.”

O Christians! Haughty, arrogant, wretched. O you whose sickly mental visions still places your confidence in backward steps. Do you not know what worms we are. Born to form the angelic butterfly to fly without defence to his judgement. Why does your spirit soar in flight when still you are imperfect grubs, no more than worms yet to attain the final form of life.

Even if sometimes one sees a roof held up by a corbel carved in human shape, with its chest pressed tightly against its knees which though unreal creates real distress to see. So were these souls and this the sense I felt , some were more and others less bent over, according to the burden pressing down.Yet even the most patient of them all appeared to say through tears, ‘I can’t go on!’

Canto XI



“Our Father who abides in heaven, not by them constrained, but dwelling there for greater love for primal works above, hallowed be your name and omnipotence by all created things, just as it is for me to offer thanks to you for your sweet influence, let the peace of your kingdom come to us. If it does not however much we strive with our strength alone we cannot reach it. Just as your Angels singing Hosanna offer their wills to you as sacrifice so may it be with the will of all men. Give us this day our daily manna, for without it those most eager to advance through this harsh wilderness alone, fall back. Even as we forgive our trespassers so may you forgive us our trespasses. Look not on our undeserving merits. Try not our strength so easily subdued against the ancient foe, but lead us from temptation and the one who goads our race. This last request we address to you Lord, not for ourselves who have no need we know, but for the ones who yet remain behind.”

Praying thus for our advance those shades carried on beneath their burdens like the ones sometimes one bears in dreams making their tired way around the first corners each to his own degree of suffering, purging themselves of this world’s filthiness. If hope for us is always prayed by these think of what can be done for them on earth by those whose wills are rooted in goodness. Indeed we should help them to purify the stains they carried from this world. So that pure and light they may reach the starry spheres.

“Ah! “ My guide said “ May justice and compassion soon unburden your load so you wing your way to the goal of your desire. Say which side will us most speedily to the stairs. If there are many paths, the one least steep. This man who comes with me carries the weight of Adam’s flesh and so against his will is slow in his ascent” So spoke my guide.

Other words were then spoken in answer though it was not clear to us who replied. “Follow us, on the right side of this bank you will find a pass one living might climb. Were I not impeded by this boulder which forces me to bow my proud neck down and watch the ground I would look at this man named and still alive in the hope I might move him to pity for my burden. I am Omberto and the sin of pride has not harmed me alone but all my house drawing them into calamity. This burden I refused while still alive I bear among the dead at God’s pleasure.”

My face was bent low as I listened. One of those souls not he who had just spoken twisted beneath the weight that burdened him, looked and recognised my face. He called out, straining to keep his eyes fixed upon me as completely hunched I walked on with them.

“O, “ You must be that Oderisi glory of Agobbio and that art in Paris they call illumination.”

“Brother, “ he said “the page is painted by Franco Bolognese. Smile more brightly. The honour now is his, mine but a part. In truth if alive I would have been less

kind the desire to excel all ruled me then for such pride
one pays the penalty here and I would not yet be there
were it not that while I could still sin I turned to God. Oh
empty glory of all human powers, Cimabue once thought
to hold the field in painting, now its Giotto the hail,
clouding the brightness of the former's fame. Likewise one
Guido takes the others claim to poetic glory already born
perhaps is one to chase both from the nest. Worldly
renown is but a breath of wind nothing more shifting now
here now there and it changes quarter changing names. If
you died a ripe old age would your fame be greater in a
thousand years than if you chanced to die before you made
it past the pap and baby talk? A thousand years, a briefer
span than the merest twinkle compared to the slowest
sphere in heaven. You see that soul crawling along ahead,
the whole of Tuscany claimed his name, now it's scarcely
whispered in Sienna. Where he once ruled and managed
to destroy raging mob that attacked from Florence. Was
arrogant then as now its prostitute. Earthly glory is like the
colour of grass, it comes and goes. He who makes it
whither first drew it green and tender from the ground.“

I said then “The truth you speak fills me with humility and
pricks my swollen pride. But tell me who do you mean?”

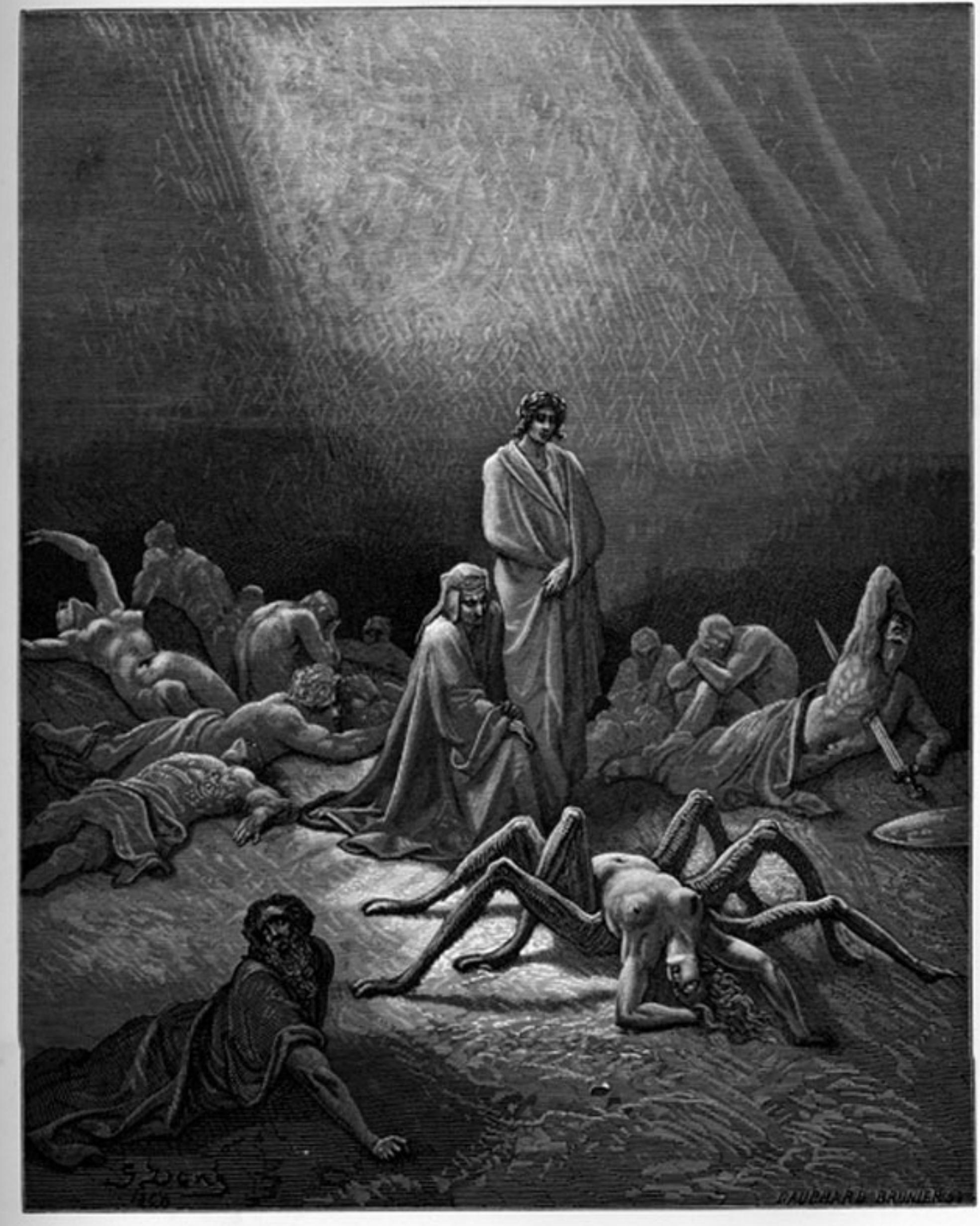
He answered ”The presumptuous Provenzan Salvani, who
sought to master all of Sienna.“

But I said “ If a spirit will delay repentance to the last is it
not true he must unless good prayers help, wait below for

as along as a time as he spent alive? Tell me how Salvani arrived so quick?"

"At the moment of his greatest glory," said the soul "In Sienna's marketplace of his own free will he laid by shame to ransom a friend who was suffering in Charles' prison. Every vein in him trembled as he humbled himself. I say no more. I know I speak obscurely. But soon you will find your neighbour's acts such that what I say can be explained. His deed will release him from those confines."

Canto XII



As oxen in the yoke will walk in step that burdened soul and I moved together for as long as my kind teacher allowed. But when he said “Leave him now and walk on, for each one here must speed his boat ahead with all the force he has, with wings and oars”

I drew myself erect again as a man ought though my thoughts were still bowed. I was moving happily on way following in my Master’s steps we both showing what speed we could now progress at, when he said to me “Look down at the path, your journey will be easier if you pay attention to what lies at your feet.”

As on the lids of tombs set in the floor the bear a carved image of the living better to preserve the memory of the dead which recollection may prick men to tears though only souls of piety are moved. So I saw but more with skilful carving and more lifelike semblance on the pathway as it protruded from the mountain side. I saw the one created more noble than all the other beings descending like a boat of lightning from heaven. Opposite that I saw Briareus transfix by the celestial shaft heavy on the earth in death’s fatal chill. I saw Thymbraeus, Pallas, and Mars still in armour close to their father, looking down on the giant scattered limbs. O Niobe! I saw your eyes weeping stone tears from your carved image on the path. One each side of you seven slain children and soul shown stuck by this own sword lying still and lifeless on mont Gilboa which ever after wards felt no rain or dew. O mad Arachne! I saw you clearly already become half spider wretched don the woven thread that won you such pain.

Troy I saw, shown in ashes and ruins. Proud Ilion fallen low and squalid. Who was he, master of the brush or pen who drew such shades and features as to fill even the most discerning minds with awe? The dead seemed the dead, the living alive. None who saw the scenes themselves saw more true than I, head bent, treading on the pavement.

We had now circled more of the mountain and much more of the Sun's path was travelled than I gauged so absorbed when my guide who always kept a watchful eye began "Raise your head! There is no more time for that walking so lost in thought. See an Angel comes hurrying to welcome us. See too, the sixth handmaid returns from her service to the Day. Let your face show reverence so he may send us onwards with good will. Think that this day will never dawn again."

Still closer to us clothed in white he came. A radiantly fair creature, his face washed by the trembling light of stars of dawn, he opened his arms and spread out his wings. "Approach, the steps near at hand." He said "From there the climbing will be easier".

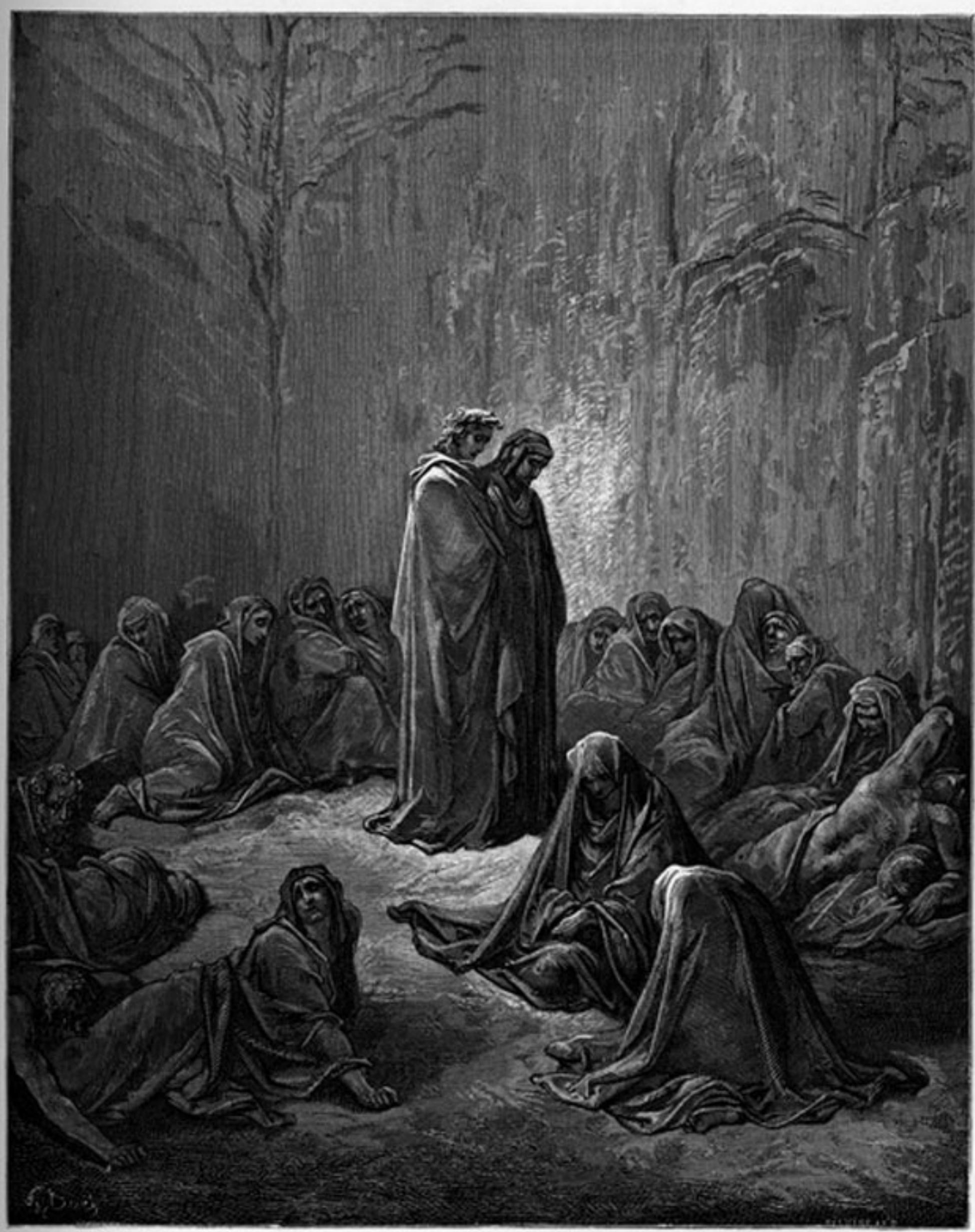
While we were walking there "Beati pauperes spiritu" rang out, so sweetly beyond all description. How different were those passage ways from hell's!. Here one enters to the sound of song, but below to wailing and savage laments. As we climbed up the sacred steps it seemed to me I felt much lighter than before. On the level plane among the proud souls I was prompted to ask "What heavy thing has

been taken from me so that I stride scarcely with any effort in my climbing?"

My guide said "When the Ps still remaining on your forehead though nearly faded now have been erased completely like this one, good will have overcome your feet, so that not only will all weariness be gone, but they will rejoice as they are urged to climb"

Then I acted, just as everyone does, suddenly made aware by others' stares though something they did not know on their head where at a hand will try to ascertain and seek by touch and feel and so fulfil the function that the eye cannot supply. Spreading out my right hand fingers I found but six of the seven letters inscribed by him who holds the gold and silver keys; observing this my guide just smiled at me.

Canto XIII



We reached the summit of the stair to find a second time the mountain that heals all those who climb it cut by a terrace. The ledge exactly like the one below circles around the hill although its arc winds a tighter curve. Here no sings of souls or carving greet us, the cliff face is bare. The path, raw stone of a livid colour.

“If we wait here” the poet said “to ask a passing soul which direction to take I fear our choice will be too long delayed” So looking up and staring at the Sun he made a pivot point to his right side and turning wheeled his body’s left side round. Gentle light in whom I trust entering on this path unfamiliar, guide us!” he said “ for we need guidance in this place your rays warm the world and illuminate they must always be our guide unless higher reason urges the opposite.“

We had already journeyed as far as men will reckon a mile down on earth and quickly following our eager will. When we heard spirits who could not be seen come flying towards us speaking sweet invitations to love’s table. The first said aloud “Vinum non habent” and passed behind repeating the words without rest. Before the speech had died came another “I am Orestes!” “ it said it did not remain but passed us by.

“What are these voices? Sweet Father “ I asked and just as I was saying this a third had winged past “Love those who do you harm” It said. My good master replied “Envious souls the circle scourges here so the chords used for the whip are made of Love as your hear. Sounds of envy

punished and envy curbed are different as most likely you will hear before we move through the Pass of Pardon. Look carefully ahed of you and see in front of us leaning against the cliff and sitting on the ground people at rest."

And as i looked ahead my eyes grew wide. I saw shades in cloaks coloured like the stone and as we moved closer towards these souls, I heard the cry "Mary, pray for us!" then "Michael ,Peter, and all the saints as well!"

I think no man yet on earth has a heart that is so hard pity would not pierce it at the site that met me then. I walked up, close enough to see what was their penance and the grief pressed bitter tears out of my eyes.

The eyelids of these shades had been sewn shut but with threads of iron like new court hawks whose eyes are stitched to tame their restlessness.

I felt I offered them discoutesy staring at them when they could not see me, which made be turn back to my counsellor. who knew quite well what I tough mute had meant.

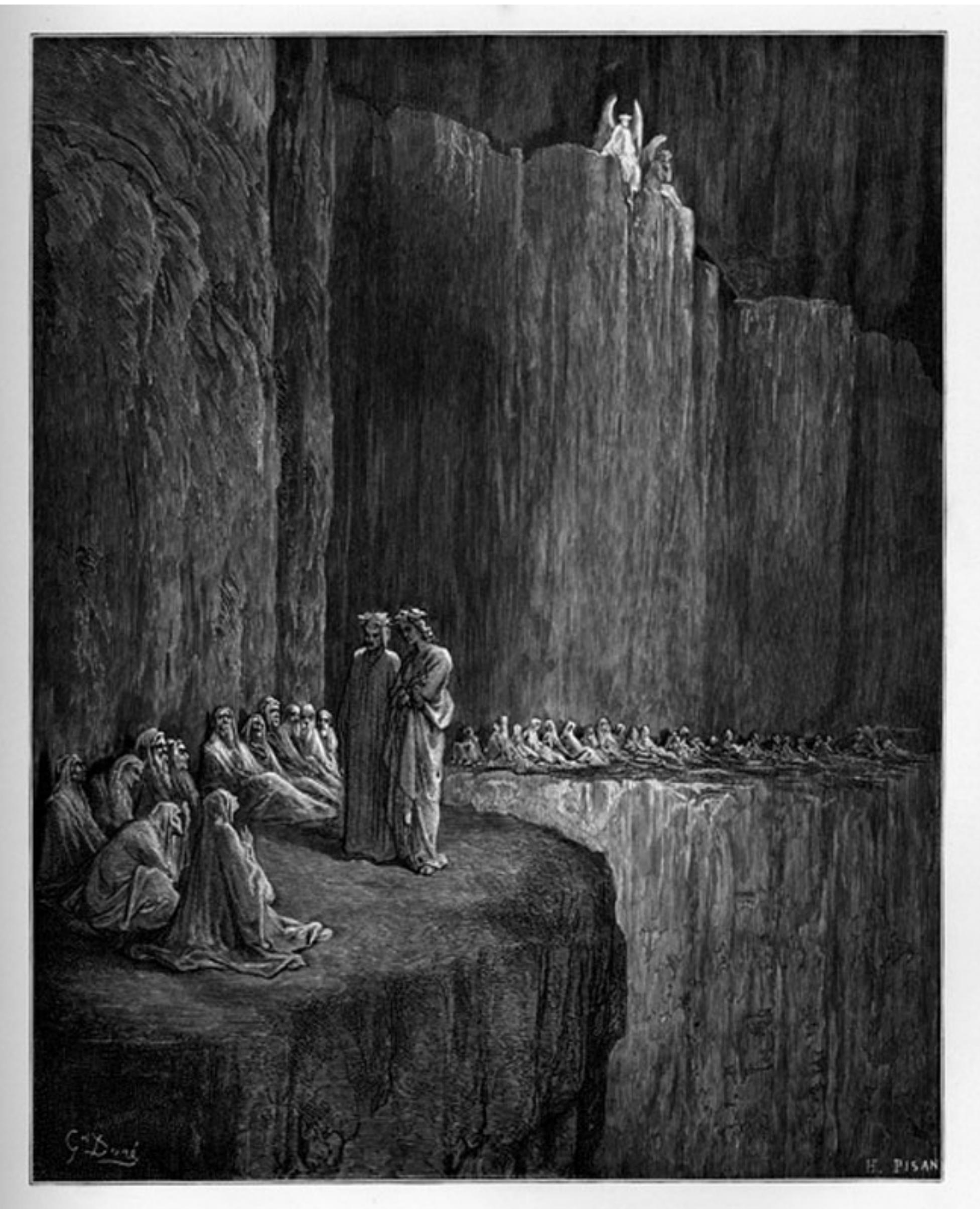
"Speak" he said "but briefly and to the point."

Virgil went with me on the outer side near the terrace's edge where no parapet existed to keep a man from plunging. On the inner side with the devout shades through their eyes sewn together so harshly forced the tears that flowed down their spirit cheeks, I turned to them

“O shades! Assured of that shining light the object of your longing may God’s grace wash your conscience clean of scum so that memory’s stream may flow stainless. Please, for I should welcome it, is there among you an Italian spirit perhaps if I know that I can help him”

The answer to my question seemed to come from further ahead. I made myself heard there and I saw one shade who looked expectant. Its chin was raised as the blind do. I said “Soul! Learning to subdue yourself of the ascent if it were you who spoke tell me what was your name where did you live? She said I was of sienna with others here I mend my wicked life with weeping. And beg of Him he will grant us Himself. Sapient I was not though I was named Sapia. My joy was mothers grief more than any good luck that fell to me. Listen now, if you do not believe me, hear and judge just how far my folly went to the arc of my long years descended. It happened that my town’s folk close to Colle engaged in battle with their enemies. I prayed for what God had already willed . Our men were beaten routed forced into bitter flight. Watching the chase I felt joy so fierce I raised my shameless to God like a black bird when the Sun shines a while and cried. ‘I have lost all fear of you!’ At my final hour I sought peace with Him but no penitence would have reduced my debt had it not been for Pier Pettignano who moved by charity for me to grieve remembered me in his holy prayers. But who you are, questioning our state here as you move on? If I judge right with eyes as yet unseen still breathing our your words.”

“My sight” I said “will be denied me here but not for long. Envy was not a sin my eyes often committed wth their gaze. A far greater fear makes my soul tremble. The penance done below. I feel the weights of the first terrace pressing already.”



Canto XIV

“Who is this man who circles our mountain even though death has yet to grant him flight and opens and closes his eyes at will?”

“ I don't know but I know he is not alone. Ask him, why don't you? You are nearest to him. speak to him gently so he will answer you.”

On my right I heard these two spirits discussing me as they lent on each other. They raised their faces then to speak to me. One began “O soul! prisoner of the flesh living still but ascending heavenward for love console us tell us who you are where do you come from? The grace God gives you never seen before sets us marvelling”

So I said “ Through the heart of Tuscany a little stream born in Falterona winds more than a hundred miles down its course. This body I bring from that river's banks. As for saying my name there is no point for I have one no fame on earth, as yet.”

“If I have clearly understood the sense of what you say,” replied the first spirit “you are speaking of the River Arno.
“

“Why would he hide the name” the other said “ as one might in hiding a thing too fowl?”

“Why I don't know answered the shade addressed but it did his right for such a name to die. The inhabitant of that squalid valley have so changed their natures it all seems that Circe might have fed them in her pen. The river starts its miserable course among foul hogs deemed more fit for acorns than for any food that men might consume. It flows on dropping down discovering curse whose snarls have more power than their bite and scornful of them it turns away its snout. Farther down still it descends this cursed ditch and the more it widens the more and more it finds the dogs changing to packs of wolves. Descending then running through many deep ravines it runs by foxes so full of cunning there is no trap made that could ensnare them. I will not keep from speaking though this man hears me. It may be well for him to hear the words and know what truly prophecy has revealed. “

Just as a listeners face grows troubled given the news of some calamity no matter what side the menace comes from I saw the other soul turned to listen grow troubled and dejected at his words.

The speech of one, the face of the other made me curious. What were their names? At this the spirit who had spoken first said “You want me to do what you refused? Since God would that this Grace glow brightly in you I shall not be miserly. Know therefore I was once known as Guido del Duca. My blood was so quickly fired with envy when I saw a man inspired to rejoice to happiness would make my face livid. Now I keep the straw from the seed I sowed. O human race! Why set your hearts and hopes there where

sharing cannot have any part. This is Renier. This is the pride and joy of Calboli. The house denied an heir possessing his great worth to follow him. From Po to the mountains between Rino and the coast his kin are not alone in lacking in the good of truth and gentle living. These lands are choked full of poisonous stumps. No husbandry could repair the soil for seeds. But go now Tuscan. I prefer to weep for my soul sorrows with what we have said."

We knew those gentle souls heard us move on by their silence. Thereof we ould be sure of having taken the right road to climb. We were taking our solitary route when we heard as lightning splits the air, a voice that came from up ahead. It said "I shall be slain by any who find me" Then it rolled past as thunder does fading away after the bursting of a cloud. The voice gave us a truce. Our ears were just recovering when another voice like peel on peel a thunder cried out "I am Aglaurus who was turned to stone" After that instead of going on I drew closer to the poet. The air was quiet now and he told me "That is the harsher bit devised to keep a man within his bounds. But men take the bait swallow the hook and allow the old adversary to draw you in. Bridal or lure, regardless. The heavens call out to you encircling revealing eternal beauties and yet you keep your eyes fixed on the ground alone and so He, the all seeing strikes you down."

Canto XV

As many as the hours which takes that sphere which like a child that plays never still to go from day break to the thirds hour's close so might remain the Sun's light than the day. There it was evening and on earth midnight. The level rays struck us full in the face for we had circled so much of the mountain that we were heading now towards the West.

Suddenly my vision was overwhelmed by a greater more splendid radiance, brighter than I had ever sensed before. My mind was left amazed and wondering. I lifted my hands up to my forehead so as to employ them as a visor smitten by the light's excessive splendour. But as a ray reflected off water or of glass leaps at an angle equal to the angle of its descent about the plummet lines as experiment shows, so it seamed I was struck by rays of light that were bouncing up from just before me. Dazzled I quickly turned away and said "Kind Father, What is this? I try, but in vain, to shield my eyes from such bright light and it seems to move towards us."

He said "Don't wonder if you can still be dazzled by heaven's household. This is an Angel, who has come with an invitation to ascend. Soon the sight of such things won't be painful but more a delight. A delight as great as nature has fashioned your soul to feel."

We stood now before the blessed Angel "Enter this way!" he joyfully announced "These stairs are less steep than before by far."

We climbed past him. Hearing from behind us “Blessed are the merciful” ringing out and then “Rejoice you who have overcome.”

My guide and I faced the hill alone then walking on and up, I hoping to learn with every step we took turned and asked him “What did the spirit form Romagna mean when he said ‘Sharing cannot have a part?’” And he replied “He knew where he most erred. And the price he paid. Hence he reviles that, hoping to prevent such grief in others. Because your longings are for earthly things where sharing makes each person’s portion less, envy pumps at the bellows of your size. But if desire were for loftier things compelled by the love of highest spheres the heart would not suffer with such distress. Up there, no more there are who say ‘That’s ours’. The more each possesses the greater good. And so in that realm the brighter love burns.”

“Now I hunger more for satisfaction than before I held my tongue” I said “New doubts and perplexities come to mind. How can a good that shared by many souls make all those who possess it more wealthy than if that good were possessed by fewer?”

So he said to me “Persist in thinking of earthly things alone and you will reap only the darkness even from the true light. That true good ineffable infinite dwelling above speeds us swiftly to love as a beam of flash from a shining thing. The more ardour it encounters the more it gives. The greater the measure of love we have more eternal good

we receive. The more souls on high each with love for each the more all will love with more to love well. Every soul a love mirror, mirroring . If my speech has not appeased your hunger soon you will see Beatrice. She will make sure that your longing is truly satisfied. Now strive hard so that the other five wounds on your brow are erased like the first two. The wounds that only contrition can heal.”

“I am content” I was about to say when I saw I had reached another circle. My desiring eyes kept me silent. It seemed to me I was suddenly caught in an ecstatic vision, a temple filled with people, a woman at the door, she spoke tenderly as a mother would. “O my son why have you done this to us? Your father and I searched for you weeping.” She ceased to speak and the vision vanished as quick to disappear as to appear. Then another woman appeared to me and her cheeks flowed with tears distilled from grief. Grief born of the spirit of great anger. She spoke “If you are ruler of this city for whose naming even Goddesses strived, a city shining as the source of all art, take vengeance on those wanton arms that dared to embrace our daughter Pisistratus.”

And then it seemed a kind and gentle lord with a face serene and mild answered her “What shall we do to those wishing us hurt if we condemn those who offer us love.”

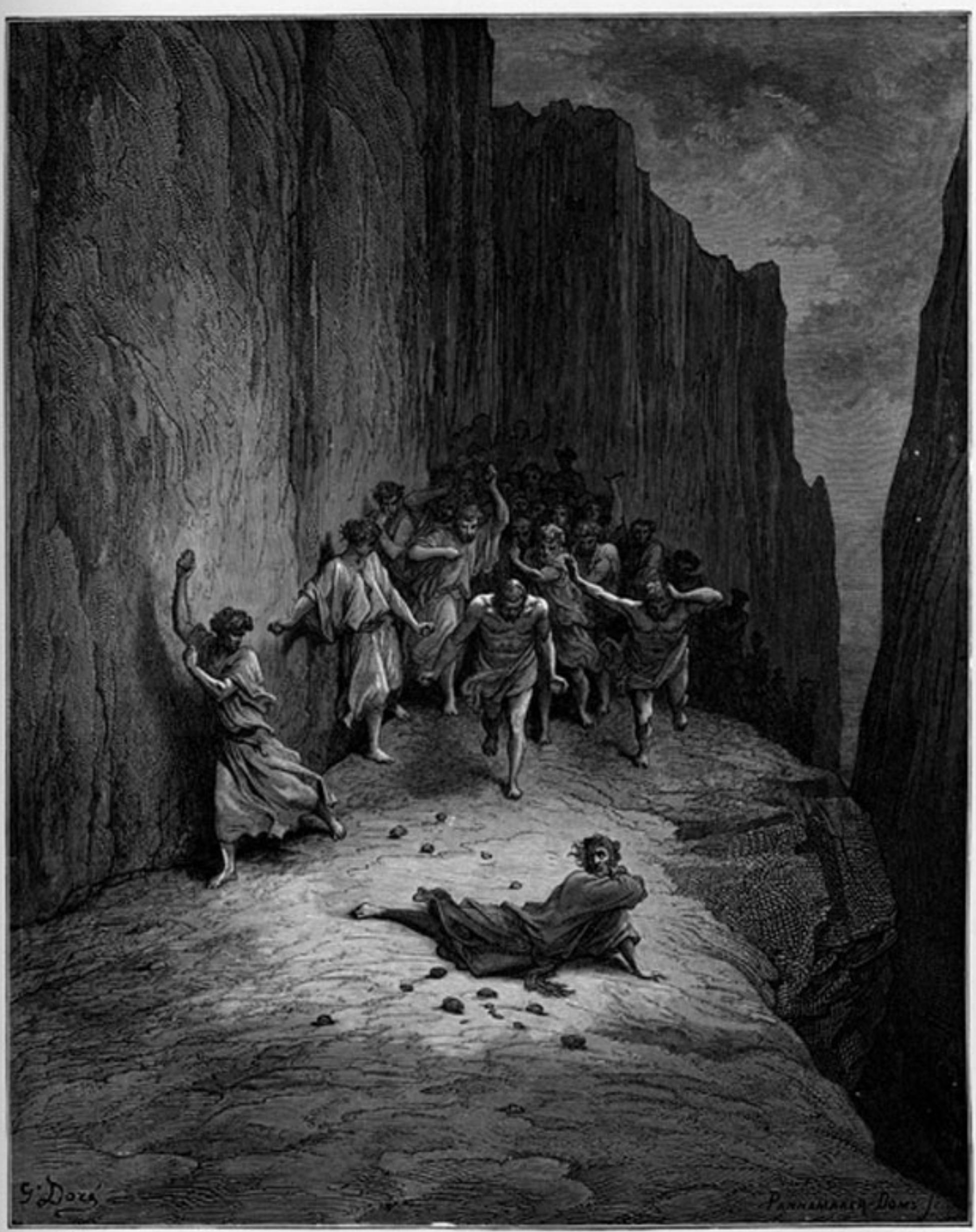
And I saw people ignited by hate stoning a boy to death and all the while they screamed “Kill him! kill him!” at each other.

I saw him sinking slowly on his knees as the weight of death forced him to the ground. Still with his eyes on heaven's open gates and despite his torture he prayed to God for forgiveness for these, his persecutors, his face unlocking compassion for them. And when my soul returned to awareness of the true reality outside it I recognised my errors and their trulls.

My leader seeing me behave as one who was trying hard to shake off sleep, said "What's the trouble? Have you lost all control? You have staggered for more than half a league like someone drunk on wine or half asleep."

"If you listen to me, gentle Father" said I "I would tell you the things that appeared while I had no mastery of my limbs." And he "If you wore a hundred masks on your face you couldn't hide the slightest thought from me. What you saw was shown so that you might learn to let your heart be open to the peace that flows down from the eternal fountain. I did not ask 'Whats wrong?' as one who sees with the eyes only, which cannot function once the soul and body leave each other. No, I asked this to give strength to your limbs, so must the wise stir the laxen and slothful to use their waking hours when they return."

We trudged along as evening came on, straining our eyes in the setting splendour as far ahead as we could see. But gradually smoke as black as night began to form drifting down towards us. We could do nothing to avoid its grip it left us bereft of sight and pure air.



G. Doré

PARIS
PARIS
D'AMOUR

Canto XVI

The darkness of hell or of a night deprived of every planet and the barren skies shadowed by thick drifting clouds never drew so dense a veil across my vision, covered my eyes so harsh a texture, as did the smoke that wrapped around us there. My eyes could not endure the sting, so my wise and faithful guide came closer offering his shoulder for protection.

Just as the blind man follows his guide in order not to stray or strike something that might injure him even kill him so I moved through the acrid filthy air while listening to my guide who told me “Stay close, take care you do not lose me here.”

I could hear voices all praying it seemed to the Lamb of God who takes away our sins that he be merciful and grant them peace. Agnus Dei” began each prayer they sang all in unison and all the same words making an air of perfect harmony. “Master, those voices I here,” I asked “ are they souls?”

“They are” he said “they loose the knot of wroth”

“And who are you whose body cleaves the smoke? Speaking of us as though you still use months to measure the passing time?” said a voice.

My master turned to me on hearing it, “Reply! “ he said “ Then ask is this path right?”

“Come creature, you who purify your soul who return it fair to who made you. Follow me and hear wonders.” I said then.

“I will follow you as far as I am allowed.” He retuned “If we cannot see for smoke our hearing will stop us drifting apart.”

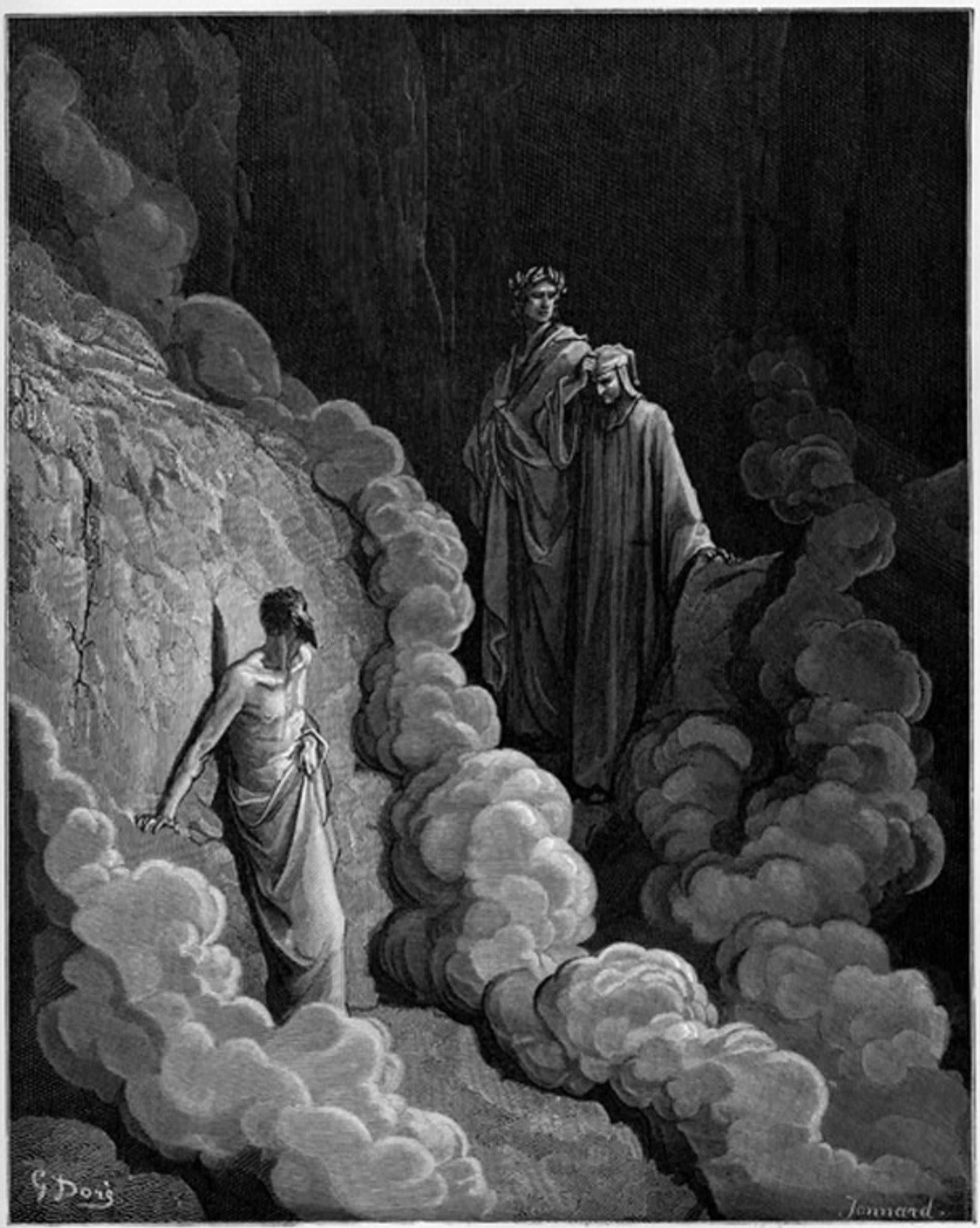
So I said then “I journey heavenward still wrapped in the swaddling that death unwinds. My path here was via the pains of hell. Since God has given me a special grace in his desire that I should see his court through ways beyond man’s imagination, tell me before you were cut off by death who were you and please is this way right for the pass above? Your words will be our guide.”

“Once I was a Lombard. My name Marco. I knew the ways of the world and loved that good at which men would no longer bend their bows.” He said and added then “The path you take leads directly upwards. When you reach there I pray you, pray for me.”

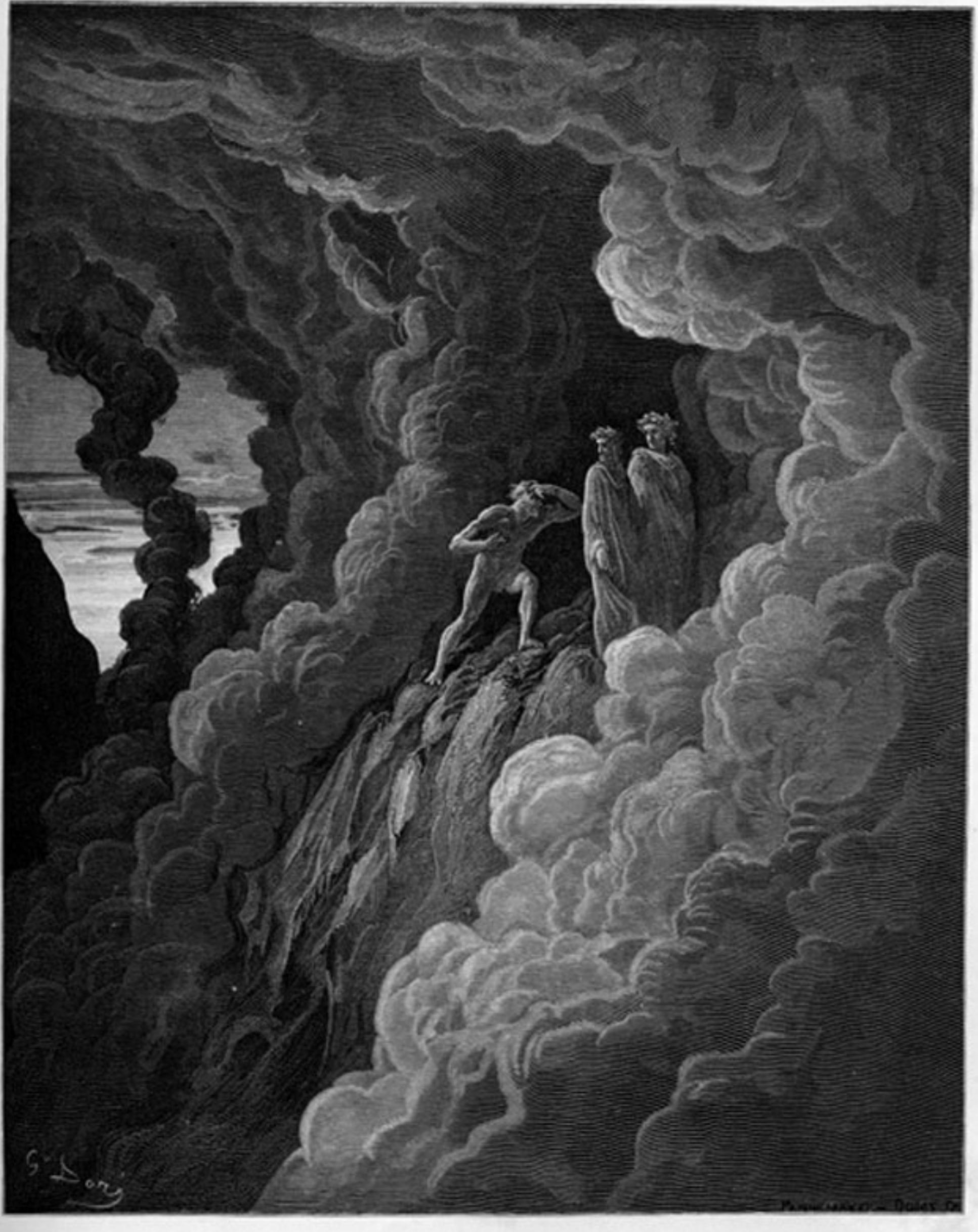
“I would.” I said “I pledge my faith to you and yet a doubt in me will burst unless I let it out. Below it was a simple doubt button as I compere your words with what I heard it doubles. As you say indeed the world is stripped entirely of virtue and lies beneath the heavy cloak of villainy. What is the cause of this? Some say heaven some find it on the earth. Please make it clear.”

A deep sigh from which sorrow formed. “Alas” was his beginning then “The world is blind,” he answered “and you clearly come from there you living men still assign everything to the influence of spheres. Just as if they swept all things on earth along with them. Were this true then free will be destroyed. On a nobler nature and greater power you who are free depend. It created the mind you have, beyond the spheres control. So if the present world has gone astray in your selves lies the cause and only there. Now like a warning scout I will explain. From the fond hands of God and loved by Him before its creation issues the soul which like a child at play weeps and laughs, simple, pure and unaware except that springing from a joyful Maker it turns attracted to things that bring it delight. First it savours trivial toys and these beguile the soul and it runs after them unless his guide or rein curb its love. So men need laws as a restraint. A king too at least able enough to discern the towers of the true city. But now though they exist who enforces the laws. No one. the shepherd who perceives the flock can chew the cud but lacks the cloven hoof. And so the flock who see the shepherd snatch only the same world goods they crave seeks to feed on them and looks no further. Misrule, has caused the world’s state of evil. Celestial forces, they do not corrupt. Rome, that made the world good, once set two suns making two paths visible lightning up the worldly path and the path that is God’s. Now each sun eclipses the others’ rays. The sword has joined the shepherd’s crosier. Paired together they must bring misrule since they need have no fear of each other. Here godspeed I may go no further on. You see the rays of light that break the smoke

already brightening? The Angel nears, I must leave before he sees me," with that he turned and would not hear me any more.



Canto XVII



If the mountain mist has ever caught you and you saw the world as a purblind mole remember how the vapours began to thin and the Sun's sphere came through feebly at last. And you would imagine quite easily how it seemed when I saw the Sun again, catching at the moment before it set.

With my steps matching my guide's trusty steps I came out of that cloud into the light, that on the shore below was spent by now. O fantasy! That would sweep our minds outward things so we cease to be aware though a thousand trumpets blast around us. What moves you if the senses do not spur. Light moves you formed in heaven of itself or shaped by his will who sends it downward. Within my imagination I saw the cruelty of one who then transformed became the bird that delights most in song. With this my mind withdrew itself to what imagining might bring to it. Nothing from the outside could enter in. There into my profound fantasy reigned a figure who was crucified. Showing us he died, his savagery in disdain. Around him stood great Ahasuerus, Ester his wife and the just Mordecai sincere and upright in word and in deed. Then when this picture shattered of itself just like a bubble losing the water which forms around it, there rose a vision. A young girl weeping bitterly who said "O my queen! Why in your anger did you desire to destroy the life that you had. You took life to lose Lavinia, now you have lost me. I am she who mourns your death mother, before any other."

As sleep is broken when light strikes closed eyes suddenly yet lingers before it dies my fancy fell from me when I was

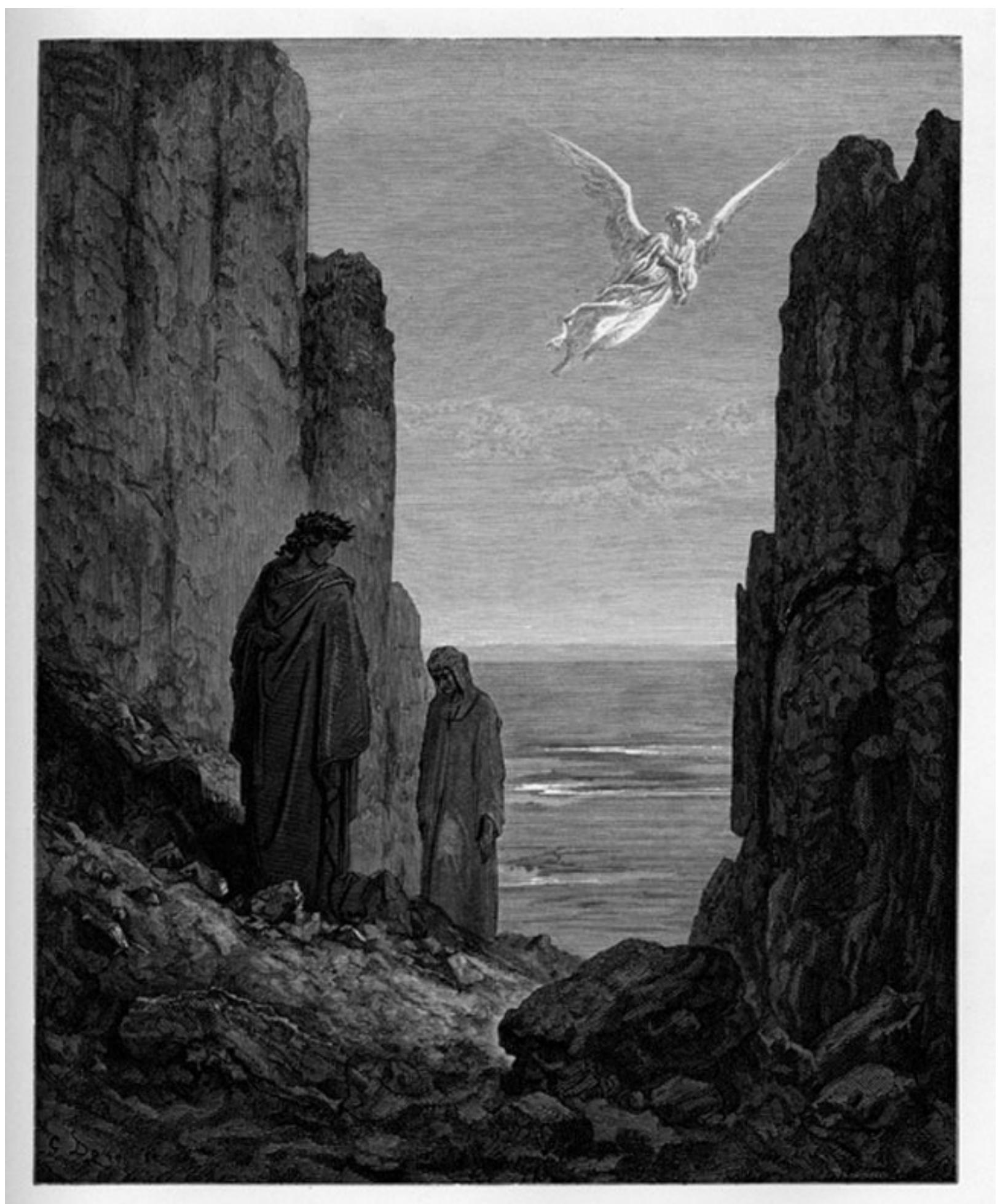
struck across my eyes by a light far stronger than any beam that we know here on earth. Looking round to find out where I might be, I heard a voice. "Here is the place to climb." It drove all other intent from my mind leaving me wanting to see who had spoken, restless till my desire was face to face.

But as the sun too bright defeats our sight and veils its own form I felt my sight fail. "This spirit is divine who comes to show the road upwards to us before we ask and hides itself with his own radiance. He serves us as a man would serve himself. He who sees the need but waits to be asked is already cruelly set to deny. Let us accept his invitation and strive hard to climb before the darkness falls. Since we mayn't ascend once the day dies." So said my leader and together then we turned towards the stairs.

At the first step I felt something like the movement of a wing brush against my face. And I heard the words "Blessed are those free of sinful anger! " Above us the last rays before nightfall were so high the stars had begun to show. My strength, why is it deserting me now? I said to myself feeling suddenly compelled to halt all force drained from my legs. We had just reached the last step of the stairs and found ourselves stopped there like a boat when it is being run up on to the shore. I waited for a moment listening for some sound to come form this new circle. Then turning to my master I asked him "Tell me kind Father, what offence is purged within the circle that we have reached here? Our feet have been halted but not your words"

So he replied “Just here, the love of good that was too faintly pursued is mended. The once lazy oar is here applied with zeal. But so you understand me more clearly grant me your attention. You shall gather some useful fruit from our delaying here. Neither creator nor creature” he said “ever lacked love. You know there are two kinds, natural love and love that springs from reason. Natural love is always without error but reason can err either choosing sinful goals or through too much or too little vigour. While it is directed to the eternal good and to worldly things only secondly, it cannot be the cause of sinful pleasure. But attending to evil or twisted to good by excess or not enough zeal, the creature, made turns against his maker. From this then you can understand how love must be the seed of every virtue and of all acts that deserve punishment . Now since love cannot ever turn away from the welfare of its subject there is nothing that is not free from self hatred and since no creature can be seen as self existing, cut off from the first being, each being is cut off from hating God. So it follows, if I argue truly the evil that we love is others’ harm and in your clay this love comes in three ways. There is the man who hopes successful growth from the downfall of another. He longs to see his neighbours excellence brought low. Then there is he who if outdone then fears for his own fame, power, honour, favour and angrily seeks his neighbour’s harm. The last man wronged passionate for revenge seeks only how to harm his fellow man. This three fold love is wept for down below. Now understand the other kind of love, the love that seeks a good without due measure. Everyone

apprehends dimly and craves the good in which the mind may be at rest and so all men strive to reach towards it. But if the love that urges you to it or to know it is lukewarm then this ledge following confession will punish that. There is another good which brings no gain nor makes men glad. It is not happiness, not true essence, the fruit and root of all good. The love that too eagerly pursues this end is mourned on the three terraces above us. But how such love is divided threefold I leave for you. Discover this yourself."



Canto XVIII

When he completed his argument the lofty scholar looked with eagerness at my face to see if I was satisfied. And I who felt a new thirst was silent since within I wondered could he perhaps be displeased with all these questions of mine? But that pure Father who had recognised the timid longing I would not express, spoke first and thus encouraged me to speak.

I said “Master, my sight is made so sharp by the light you shine I see clearly now all that your words speak of or analyse. Therefore I pray you define love for me which is as you tell me the minister of every good deed and its contrary.” He said, “Focus your intellect’s sharp eyes on me and let the error of the blind who lead the blind be evident to you. The soul being created quick to love responds to everything that pleases it as soon as pleasure wakes it into life. From what is real your power to apprehend takes an image which it displays in you forcing your mind to turn towards it. And if turned the soul inclines steadily to it. This propensity then is love. Just as flames ascend because the nature of fire compels it to fly to that sphere an element where it would last longer so does the soul when caught up in desire move the loving mind and until the thing it loves has made it glad will never rest. See how far from the truth they have wandered, those who insist that any kind of love within itself is good love and praiseworthy. Love’s substance seems worthy to be admired, but not each seal is good though the wax is.”

“What you say and my own attending wit,” I answered
“clearly show me what love is but that has filled me with
still greater love. If love comes without doubt and if the
soul moves only on that one foot what merit is there is
going straight or crooked.” And he to me “ I can explain to
you as much as reason sees. As for the rest wait for
Beatrice. It is the work of faith. Even if we grant that
necessity is the source of every love that fires you, you still
have the power to restrain such love. This noble power is
what Beatrice means, by freedom of the will. Remember
that. If She should ever speak of it to you.”

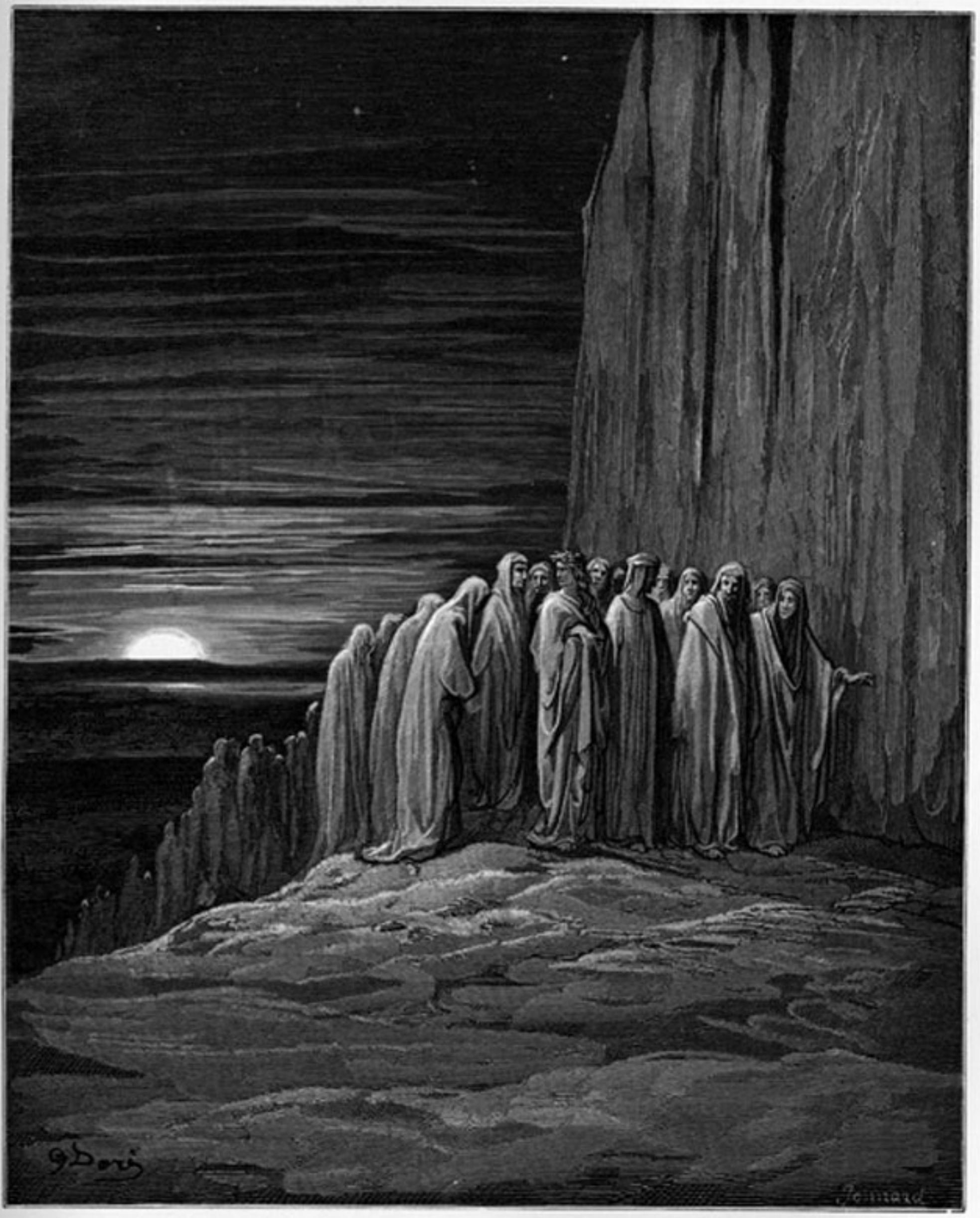
Mid night was almost behind us. The moon shaped like a copper basin glowing bright made the stars we saw seem more scarce. Against the heavens crossed those paths the sun inflames when Roman see it set between the Sardinians and Corsicans. That gracious shade through whom Piotola won more renown than any Mantuan town, had lifted the wight of doubt I carried. I having sown the questions was then to harvest clear and lucid answers, until yet my thoughts wondered drowsily. But my sleepy mood did not last.

Suddenly from behind a mob of souls came running around the circle, heading on course for us. Just as Ismenus and Asopus soar at night in ancient times along their banks the glamour of Thebans and Bacchus, so that crowd coming round the circle was frenzied from what I could make out, driven by righteous will as well as by just love. In a moment they were on us. A great throng of spirits all running furiously “O souls! For whom such

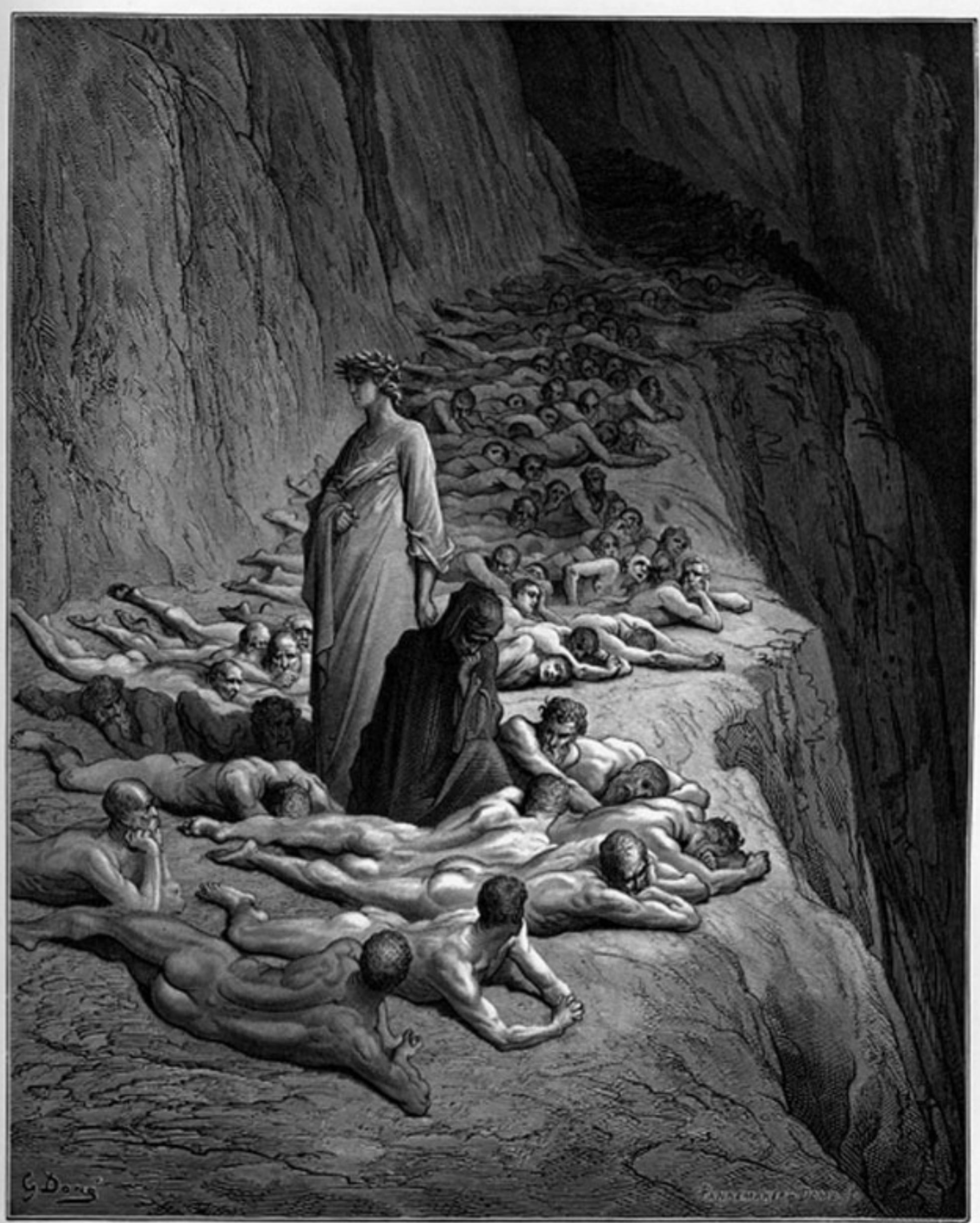
eager server now compensates the sloth and negligence you showed in doing good half heartedly this living man rest assured I do not lie desires to mount as soon as once again the sun shines. So say where is our passage?" My guide said this.

One of the souls replied "O follow behind. You will find the passage! We cannot stop, too anxious to advance. If it seems courtesy, forgive us. I was Abbot of San Zeno in Verona, under valiant Barbarossa's reign, he of whom Milan speaks bitterly. There another with one foot in the grave will soon weep over that monastery and lament he ever had that power because in place of its true shepherd he put his bastard son unsound of mind even more than his body was deformed."

If he said anymore or fell silent I did not hear, since he raised beyond us, but I heard this much and was glad to have then when those shades have passed so far beyond they were seen no more. I had a new thought and from that another, then many more. And so I wandered in my mind until my eyes closed and my thoughts became my dreams.



Canto XIX



In that hour when the heat of the day fails subdued by the earth and sometimes Saturn, and can no longer warm the moon's chill rays. And when in the East geomancers see Fortuna Major rise before the dawn along a path soon to be brightly lit, a woman appeared to me in my dream. She was stuttering and her eyes were squint, she stumbled as she walked on crooked feet, her hands were dissevered, her face sickly sallow. I stared at her and just as the Sun revives the body's limbs made numb by a night's cold my gaze seemed to set free her tongue and then straighten out her twisted frame. Her one face became so fused with a hue, love desires, and then once my gaze had worked loose her tongue she began to sing captivating me making it difficult to turn away. "I am," she sang "I am the sweet Siren whose song beguiles the mariner at sea. I am so alluring, so delightful, I turned Ulyssis from his wanderings though he longed to journey. Who bides with me seldom departs. I so satisfy him." Her lips were not yet closed when there appeared a lady by me, alert and saintly, who cast the Siren into great confusion. "Oh Virgil, Virgil, Tell me who is this?" She demanded scornful. He stepped forward and gazing fast on the holy lady seized the other baring her belly tearing her clothes in front. My sleep fled me I woke sick with a stench that rose form her. I looked at my good master and he cried "Rise and come. At least three times I have called you. Lets find the entrance where you may enter."

I rose with daylight already gilding the holy mountains circles. We continued. Journeying with the new sun at our backs. Following him with my brow bent as one whose

thoughts had weighted him down and hunched over looking like half the arch of a bridge. I heard a voice. “Come! the pass is this way.” it said in tones of gracious gentleness never yet heard within mortal confines. With swan like outstretched pinions the angel directed us upward to pass between two walls of stubborn rock. Then he fanned us declaring that “Blessed of those who mourn for consolation shall be theirs on eye.”

“What is it that troubles you?” said my guide “And makes you stare so at the ground? By then we had climbed on someway past the Angel.” A strange vision filled me with fear so shaking me the thoughts of it still remain. “The one you saw,” he said “that ancient witch for whom alone these souls above must weep. You saw too then how men must escape her. Let that suffice. Let your heels spurn the ground. Look on the lure on which the eternal kind is forever spinning with the great spheres.”

As a falcon looks where his talents cling then answering the falconer takes wing craving the food he has prepared for him, I did the same. Striving to reach the cleft that lets one climb above to the next round.

When I reached the fifth circle’s open ground I discovered an army of people all lying on the ground face down sighing “Adhaesit pavimento anima mea”. My soul cleaves to the dust with sigh so deep I could hardly understand what they said .

“O elect of God! You whose suffering just as in hope make easier to bear, tell us where to find the pathway upwards.”

“If you come exempt from lying prostrate and desiring the swiftest way to climb keep your right hand always on the outside.”

So the poet asked. The reply I heard came from somewhere ahead but close enough I could make out the hidden face that spoke. Turning my gaze upon my gentle guide, I saw his face glad consent and so free to do exactly as I desired I walked ahead and bent down by that soul whose words before had made me notice him.

“Spirit, whose weeping ripens within you, that without which no one returns to God I beg one moment from you O greater care. Tell me who were you? Why do you lie prone and if you yearn for any good from there where eyes still living set out make it known.”

He said to me “Why heaven turn backs on our heaven shall be made known but first know this that I was Peter’s successor. Between Siestri and Chiaveri flows a sweet river from which my family derives its noble title. For one month and a little more I learned how heavy weighs the great mantle on he who would keep it above the mire. All else is feather light. My conversion was very late. Only when I became the Roman shepherd did I discover the falseness of life. Up to that hour I was a squalid soul parted from God and lost in avarice. Here as you see I lie punished for it.”

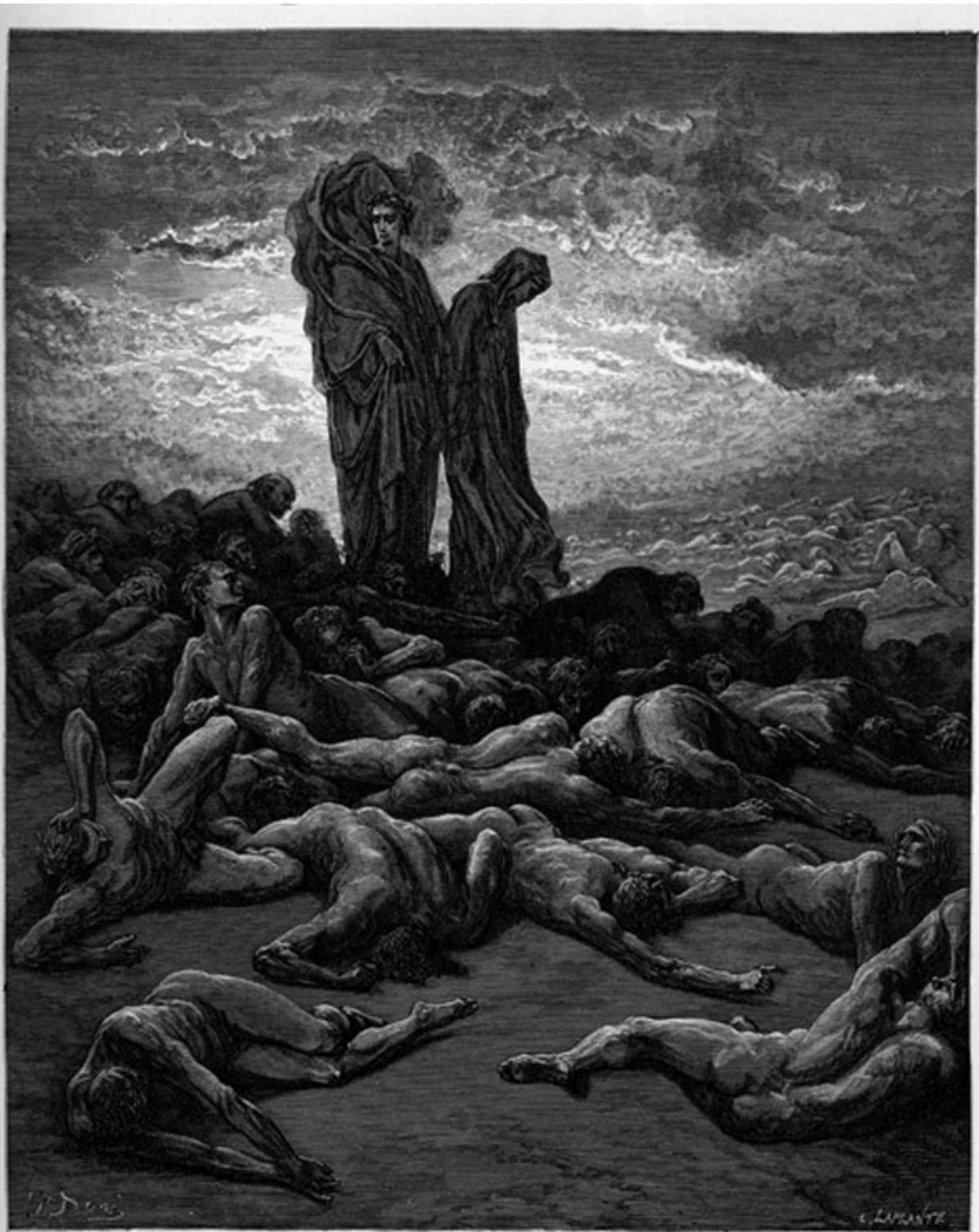
What avarice creates is shown in this purgation of converted souls nor does the mountain know more than bitter penalty. Just as we did not lift our eyes above but set our sight on worldly things instead so justice here forces our eyes to the earth. As avarice vanquished our love for good without which our labours were all in vain, so justice here fetters us hand and foot holding us captive and as it pleases our just Lord here we shall lie motionless.”

Full of an eager will to answer him I knelt down and as I began to speak through my voice alone he sensed my respect. “On your feet my brother! Why do you kneel?” He said

And I answered “Your dignity pricked my conscience as I was standing up.”

“Don't be mistaken, I am a servant with you and the others of one power. Do not stay. But go now lingering here disturbs those lamentations by which I make myself ready. To your last question, I have a niece by name Alagia. She is in herself good, just so long as our house does not lead her to stray. She is the last one left to me on earth.”

Canto XX



Against a battered will the will can test feebly. So, for his pleasure not my own I drew my sponge unfilled from the water. My guide moved ahead and I moved on too where there was space close to the cliff as one who walks a rampart hugs the battlement. Since those souls whose eyes distill drop by drop the sin that consumes the world lay too close to the farther side of the terrace edge.

Curse you ancient she-wolf, you whose power has snatched more prey than all the other beasts whose greed and hunger has never sated. O heavens whose revolutions some think determine things on earth when will he come the one whose works will drive that wolf away.

Our steps were short and slow as we went on. I intent upon the shades whose sorrow I could hear sobs and lamentations presently by chance ahead I heard one crying out in his lament “Sweet, sweet Mary!” as a woman might cry out in labour. The voice continued “How very poor you were, is clear from that inn where you set your holy burden down.” And then I heard “O good Fabricius, you chose a life of virtue and poverty not a life of wickedness and rich display.” These words pleased me so much I rushed ahead to where the spirit was from who may seem to come. He kept on speaking. Now of the largess of Nicholas, the gifts he gave the girls that all three might be honourably wed.”

I said “O shade, who speaks so much of good do tell me who you are. And why I learn you praise the praiseworthy

with these phrases. Your answer will not go unrewarded if I return to finish the short span of life that which hurries towards its end."

"I will tell you," he said "not for any hope of solace from beyond but rather for such grace that shines from you before your death. I was once the root of that evil tree which so overshadows prison and rarely any fruit is good that is ever plucked from there. Beyond my name was Hugh Capet. Born of me were the Luises and Philips by whom France has been ruled most recently. My father was a Parish cattleman. When all the line of ancient kings had failed but for the one who wore a great monk's robe my hands found the reigns that ruled the kingdom. I held so much power from my new wealth and had so many friends, the widowed crown was placed on my own son's head and from him down would descend those consecrated bones. Until the great dowry of Provence took away its sense of shame my house had little but did little wrong. Then with force and fraud in equal degree began the plunder, seizing that it might make amends, Ponthieu, Normandy, and Gascony. O avarice, can you do more to us? You have so fascinated, all my house trades in flesh of its own children. So that evil past and future may seem less I see flower-de-luce enerAlagna and there Christ, Vicar made a prisioner. I see Christ being mocked a second time, the gall and vinegar renewed and he is slain once again between two living thieves. I see the new pilot once so cruel but not satisfied with this he carries his greedy sails into the holy temple without decree. When shall I have the joy alone of seeing that retribution which hidden now

makes sweet your secret wroth. The words I uttered of the only bride of the holy ghost which brought you to me which I should offer for a commentary our words we recite as long as day lasts. When night falls we speak of the opposite. Then we tell again of Pygmalion how he turned traitor, their and parricide out of his greedy appetite for gold and the wretched avaricious Midas whose greedy request made him a star mark of ridicule for every man. And each of us recalls the foolish arcane who stole the spoils and stirred Joshua's rage which seems to sting him yet. At times we speak soft and others loud, according to the feeling that pricks us. To speak more strongly now or now more weak. I was not alone in speaking the good which daily each of us recites but here no other spirit raised his voices high.”

Now we parted from him. And presently while we striving to advance along the road as far as our efforts were permitted I felt the mountain tremble under me like something falling. At which I was gripped by a chill as cold grips a dying man. Then on every side such a shout rose up that drawing close to me my master said “You need not fear while I am still your guide.”

“Gloria in excelsis Deo” they cried or so I gathered from nearby souls whose voices I was able to hear. Just like the shepherds who first heard that song we stood there and couldn't move in suspense until the trembling stopped and the song ceased. Then we took up our holy path again observing the prostrate spirits resume their customary laments. But for me my blind ignorance had never before

so struggled in me as it seemed to then, if memory serves. Our haste was such though I could not dare to ask nor by myself could I discern any explanation. So, timid and wondering I walked on.

Canto XXI

That natural thirst which nothing except the water that gives grace satisfies the drink the poor woman of Samaria sought tormented me. Haste urged me on the path crowded with souls behind my guide and I grieved for them although their pain was justified.

Suddenly just as Luke records the Christ appeared risen from his grave from the tomb along the road a shade appeared to us coming from behind while we were trying not to trample on the crowd at our feet. We did not notice him until he spoke. “My brothers, God’s peace be with you!” He said. We turned at once. Then after like response Virgil said “Made that just court which sentenced me to eternal banishment lead you to peace to the blessed assembly”. “What?” He exclaimed as we pressed on upwards. “If you are souls God has deemed unworthy who guided you this far up the stairway?” So my teacher said then “Observe the signs traced there on his forehead by the Angel, clearly he is meant to join the righteous. But since She who sits spinning day and night has not spun out the thread that Clotho sets upon distaff and measures for all, his soul, sister to yours and mine could not have climbed alone in its ascent up here because it does not see as our eyes see. And so I was brought out of hell’s wide jaw to guide him in his going. I shall guide him just as far as what I know reaches. But tell me if you can why the mountain trembled a moment since? And why the souls down to the sea shore all cry with one voice?”

His question threaded through the needle's eyes of my desire. Just with the hope one of knowing I could feel my thirst relieved. That other shade began "The sacred laws which order these slopes will endure nothing which is disordered or not customary. This place is free from every earthly change. What heaven receives from itself may serve as a cause but up here nothing else can. No rain therefore, no hail, no snow can fall, no dew, no hoar-frost, any higher than the stairs of entry with their three brief steps, there are no clouds thick or misty, no sign of lightening, nor is Thomas's daughter shifting places as she does in your world. Nor can dry vapours rise any higher than the top of those three steps I spoke of. The place where Peter's Vicar rests his feet. Below the steps the earth quakes with tremors less or more severe but above that place no windstorm concealed in the earth has caused the ground to shake though why I do not know. It only trembles here when some soul feels cleansed enough and rises to stand erect and to climb above. Then the shout follows. The will to rise alone proves purity. Filling the soul and taking possession when its free to move from its cloister. The will to climb was there before and yet since Divine justice was set against it, it failed inspired with the need to suffer. Just as before as it desired to sin. And I who for five hundred years and more lay here with my suffering felt just now my will free to climb to a better sill. Hence you felt the earthquake and heard the shout of the pious spirits on the mountain. May He speed them on as they praise the Lord."

So it was explained to us and just as the greater thirst is quenched with greater joy the joy he brought cannot be

told in words. My wise leader answered him “Now I see the net that holds you and how you slip through and why you slip through, why you all rejoice and why the hill shakes. Now may it please you, tell me who you were? And may I find from you why you have lain here at this point for so many centuries?”

“During the age of the worthy Titus who avenged with help form the king of Kings the wounds which poured the blood that Judas sold, then I was famous.” Replied the spirit. “My name still remembered is Statius. I sang of Thebes then of great Achilles. But I fell under the load of that last burden. The sparks form which my poetic fire grew came from that holy flame the same one that kindled a thousand poets’ verse and light. I speak of the Aeneid the mother of my poetry, the nurse that fed it. Without it my work would have been nothing and to have lived on earth when Virgil lived I would stay another year of exile on the mountain.”

These words made Virgil turn. “Keep silence” his glances told me and yet will power cannot do everything. Tears and laughter followed so swift upon the passions which prompt them the more sincere the feeling the less it can be subdued. I smiled, only as quick as one might blink, but the shade fell silent, staring at me into my eyes where feeling is most clear. Then said “May your striving be successful. Tell me why just now your face flashed a smile?” Now I was trapped between opposing sides, one bids me be silent the other speak. I heave a sigh. My guide understands me. Do not be afraid to speak then, tell him

what he asks and satisfy such great yearning. So I answered “Ancient soul you wonder what it is you say that brings my smile, but wonder now at something stranger still. The one who guides my eyes to heaven is the poet Virgil from whom you gain the power to sing the deeds of men and Gods. Do not assume I smile at other cause beyond the words you spoke of him”

Now he bent to kiss my teacher’s feet but Virgil said “Brother, do not do that, you are a shadow and a shadow you see.” And he replied rising “Now you understand what degree of love burns in me when I forget our nothingness and treat our shadows as still solid things.”

Canto XXII

Now the angel was left behind who had directed us up to the sixth terrace having erased one P that scarred my brow. While I climbed behind the two swift spirits not straining at all for I was lighter than I had been at any stage before, Virgil began “Love kindled by virtue will kindle love in another. So long as the first flame shines clearly visible. Thus ever since the day the juvenile descended among us in hell’s limbo and made play in the fondness you hold for me my own goodwill to you has come to grow as great as ever was for one unknown. So now these stairs will seem so much shorter. So tell me but as a friend forgive me if my rein is over slack with too much confidence and reply to me as friend how could you when you possessed the wisdom which you were filled with such diligence find a place in your heart for avarice?”

These words moved Statius to a brief smile then he said “Every word you say reveals your love to me. But because true causes lie hidden up instead here give rise to false assumptions prompting perplexity. Your question makes it clear that you believe simply because my terrace was the fifth that my sin while I lived was avarice. Know this, I had not part of avarice. Prodigality was the sin I purged for thousands of months and had I not changed my understanding of what you wrote when you were enraged by human nature why can you not say rid hunger for gold, restrain the appetite of men. I should be below rolling weights in sorry jousts but when I understood how hands might spread too wide like wings in spending I turned

back from that sin and repented of the rest. How many will rise shaven on the last day through ignorance of this sin preventing them from reaching repentance during life and even at the hour of their death and know that when the guilt of any sin is countered by another opposing fault both sins here will whither together. Thus to purge myself I joined those who pay for avarice though what brought me to here was the opposite. Prodigality.”

“Now when you sang a savage strife of those twofold affliction of Jocasta” said the bard of the sweet Bucolic Songs it does not seem form those lines you wrote and Clio touches that you had yet turned faithful to that faith without which virtue and good works are not. If this be so, then what sun or candles led you from darkness so you might set sail and chart a course behind the fishermen.”

“It was you who directed me to drink from the waters of Parnassus’s caves who after God enlightened me.” He replied “Through you I was a poet and through you a Christian. But so you see it clearly I shall fill my outline in with colour. The world had begun to swell with three faith spread by the eternal kingdom servants and the new preachers spoke in such accord with your words those which I just repeated that I was often drawn to hear them speak. These men became so reverent to me that when Dominican persecuted them as they wept with suffering I wept too. And as I could while I lived I helped them. Their honest lives were so free of blame that I viewed every other sect with disdain before my verse brought Greeks to Thebe’s streams I was baptised but out of fear remained a

secret Christian and pretended to pass as pagan over many years and for this half hearted approach I ran round the fourth terrace for four hundred years. And now tell me who lifted the veil which concealed from my the good I speak of tell me while there is time left as we climb, where is our ancient Terentius? Do you know ? Plautus, Varro, Caecilius, tell me, are they damned? And if so where are they lodged?"

"They, Persius and many more" my leader said "dwell with that greek whom the muses suckled above all poets in the first circle of the dark prison. There we often talk of the mountain slopes where those who were our nurses ever dwell. Euripides is with us, Antiphon, Simonides, Agatho and those greeks who once wore the laurel crown on their brow. Many of your people are there too. Antigone, Deiphile ,Argia, Ismene sad still as she ever was."

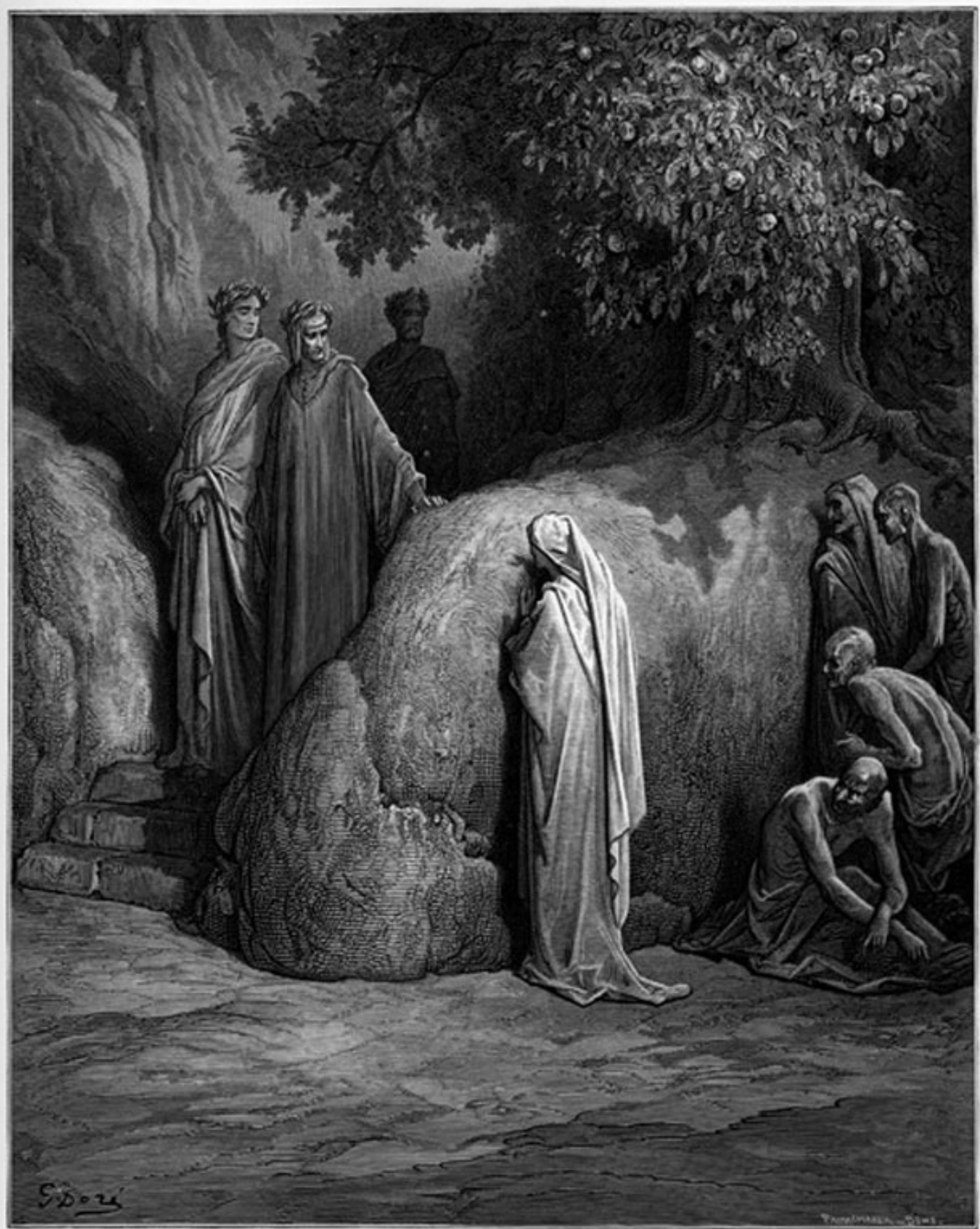
Now both poets fell silent once again gazing around freed from the walls and hill which at last broke into more level ground. Already the day's first four hand maidens were left behind but the fifth was at the chariot pole and lifting it so that its blazing horn rose award eagerly my leader said "Let us continue now with our right shoulders to the terrace edge, going around the mountain as before."

So our custom served then as banner. And we went on our way with much less doubt because that worthy soul gave his ascent. Those two walked on ahead. I followed them paying close attention to what they said which taught me much concerning poetry. But sweet conversation ended

sharply when we came on a tree that blocked our path laden with fruit and smelling pleasantly but as a fir tree tapers to its tip from branch to branch so this tree tapered down to hinder the souls in climbing I thought.

On the left a clear spring from a high rock dropped bright running water upon the leaves. As the two poets approached the tree a voice from within the branches cried out “Of this food you shall not be satisfied.” Then it cried “Mary thought more of gracing the marriage feast with honour than of her mouth which now intercedes on your behalf. And roman woman of old when they drank were satisfied with water while young Daniel acquired wisdom through his scorning of food. The first age of man was as fair as Gold. When hungry they found the taste of acorns good. When thirsty they found that every stream was nectar. In the wilderness locusts and honey fed the baptist and for this he was made great and glorious as the gospel reveals to you.

Canto XXIII



While I was peering intently through the green foliage just as a hunter might who wastes his life in chasing after birds, my, more than father said to me “Come now son, time allotted for our journey should be used more profitably than this.”

I turned my face and as quickly my steps after the two poets whose talk was such that each pace I took cost me little strain. Then suddenly we heard the tearful strains of “Labia mea, Domine” sung so as to inspire both delight and sorrow. “Dear father, What is this I hear?” I asked and he replied “Some shade perhaps who goes loosening the bonds of debt they owe.”

Just as musing pilgrims when they pass someone they do not know along the road will turn to stare and then move quickly on, so moving swiftly overtaking us a crowd of spirit devout and silent went by a with a look of doubt and wonder. Each shade had dark and sunken eyes paid faces and body so emaciated that their skin took its shape form the bones beneath. I do not think wretched Erisichthon had withered in his skin to such a state. Not even when he most feared when he would starve. The orbits of their eyes were like gem less rings, he who in the face of man reads “omo” could not fail here to recognise the “m”. Who would believe it without knowing how that the scent of fruit and water could have reduced them to such a state of longing. I was still marvelling at what might have made them so famished, I had yet to learn the cause of their leanness and scabby plight when a shade with eyes sunk deep in his head cried out aloud “What grace has granted me?” I

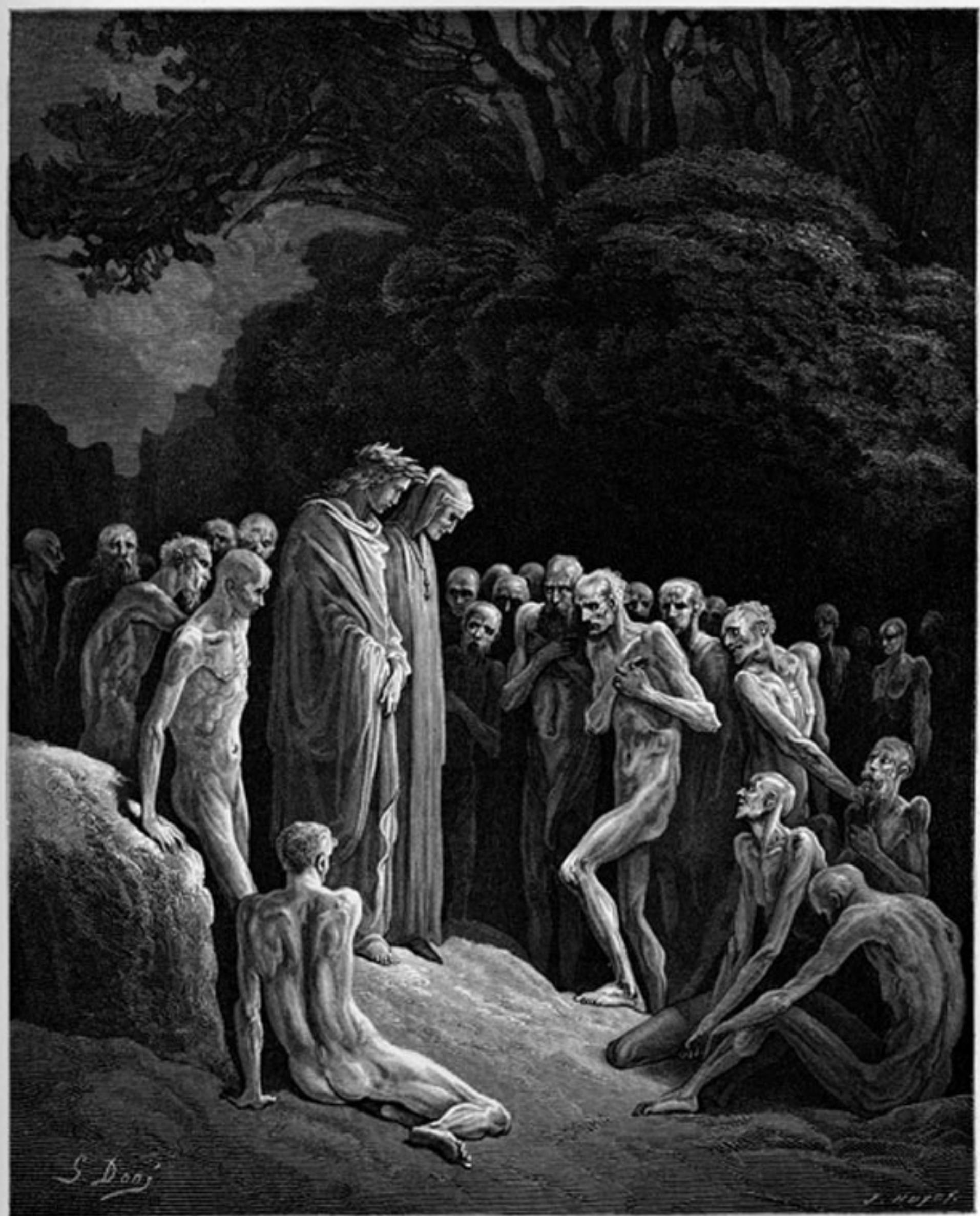
should have never recognised his face but his voice plain to me the features that his hunger had obliterated. That spark rekindled in my memory all I knew about his — looks then I realised it was Forese's face. “Please don't reproach me for the dried up scabs discolouring my sickly skin” He begged “Nor on the lack of flesh that I once wore but speak to me truly about yourself and those two souls who are escorting you. Don't stop then withhold your words from me.”

“Your face which once in death I wept over” I answered him “now gives me cause as grief as great, seeing it so sadly deformed, but tell me in God's name what strips you so. A man filled by distractions speaks badly.”

He said then “Eternal council decrees that the water and the tree behind you gain a power the makes us waste away. All of these souls who while they sing lament in appetite too gluttonous in life now grow sanctified through thirst and hunger. The fragrance of the fruit and the water that sprays through that green tree creates in us the craving for food and drink, not just once, each time we go around our pain is renewed. I speak of pain, I should say our solace for we are guided to those trees by the same who led Christ come to free us through the blood he shed to cry gladly ‘Eli’.”

So I said “Since that day Forese, when you exchanged the world for a better life until now less than five years have revolved. If you waited until the moment when you could sin no longer before you found the sweet grief that suckers

and reunites with God, how are you so quickly here? I thought to find you further down below where souls must pay for wasted time with time."



“It was my Nella and her flowing tears who sped me so swiftly here to drink the sweet wormwood of torment. With some sighs and devout prayers she set me free of that slope where one waits and freed me too from the other circles beneath this one. My gentle widow whom I loved dearly is all the more precious and dear to God as she is more alone in doing good. For even the Barbagia women of Sardinia are more modest than those of that Barbagia where I left her. O sweet bother I see a time to come not distant when it shall be forbidden to those shameless Florence women to go walking around showing the naked breast. What savages what Saracen women were so unchaste that discipline civil or spiritual was needed to make them go about decently concealed and if those brazen women only knew what the swift heavens held in store for them they would have mouths open and howling.”

I said to him “If you will but recall what we were like together, you and I, that memory must fall heavy with you now. From that life I was turned away by he who precedes me, this one, some days ago when his sister” I pointed at the sun “was shining full. He led and I followed still dressed in living flesh ever downward through the deepest night of the truly dead. His consolation has drawn me from there to circle around and to ascend this mountain which straightens you whom the world made crooked. He says he will keep me as companion until I reach the place where Beatrice is. From there I carry on but without him.” I pointed.

These things Virgil speaks to me. The other soul is he for whom this realm just now set its every mountain terrace trembling to shake him free from itself.

Canto XXIV

Talking did not slow our pace nor walking slowed our talk but conversing we sped on like ships being driven by a fair wind. Recognising that I was alive, the spirits appearing like things twice dead drew their astonishment through hollow eyes and I continuing my explanation added “His shade is slower in climbing perhaps in order to be near the other one, tell me if you can where Piccarda is and are there any here among these souls that stare so at me that I ought to note?”

“My sister if she was more virtuous than she was beautiful I do not know sits in triumph now on high Olympus and rejoices there in her crown.” He said. And added “It is not forbidden here to name each shade. Fasting has drained away any semblance the features may have had.”

And he pointed “This is Buonagiunta of Lucca; one behind him, look there, more emaciated than the others, once held a holy church within his arms.” Then he named many others one by one. All seemed content at that, at least no one that I saw offered him an angry look. But just as he who looks on notices one and a crowd above the others, I saw a shade from Lucca who seemed to know me.

“Gentucca” or something like that I heard murmured through his emaciated lips where the wounds of Divine justice hurt most. “O soul,” I said “You seem to yearn to speak. Talk, so I can hear what you have to scythe conversing may satisfy us both.”

“Though men revile my city “ he answered “there is a woman born yet unmarried who will give you cause to find it pleasing. Remember well this prophecy of mine and if I what I say you find misleading future events will prove their sense to you.” He fell quiet seemingly contented.

Even as birds that winter on the Nile taking mast flight make a flock in the air but flying faster form a single file, so did those souls there, swiftly turn away their faces and suddenly quicken up their pace because of leanness and desire. But just as he who is weary of running lets his companions go ahead, slowing until he has eased the heaving of his chest Forese let the holy flock pass on. “How long before I see you again?” He enquired of me and I answered him “How long my life will last I do not know and yet however quick is my return my longing for these shores would have me here sooner. The place where I was sent to live is day by day dispossessed of goodness and seems doomed to drift to wretched ruin. “

“Take heart.” he said “The guiltiest of all I see dragged at a beast’s fail to the pit where no sin ever receives forgiveness. At each stride the beast moves faster rushing on until it dashes him to the ground leaving the body vilely disfigured. Those fears” and here he looked up at the sky “do to have long to turn before you see plainly what my words leave obscure.”

“Stay now. Time is precious to us in this kingdom, I lose too much journeying at your pace.”

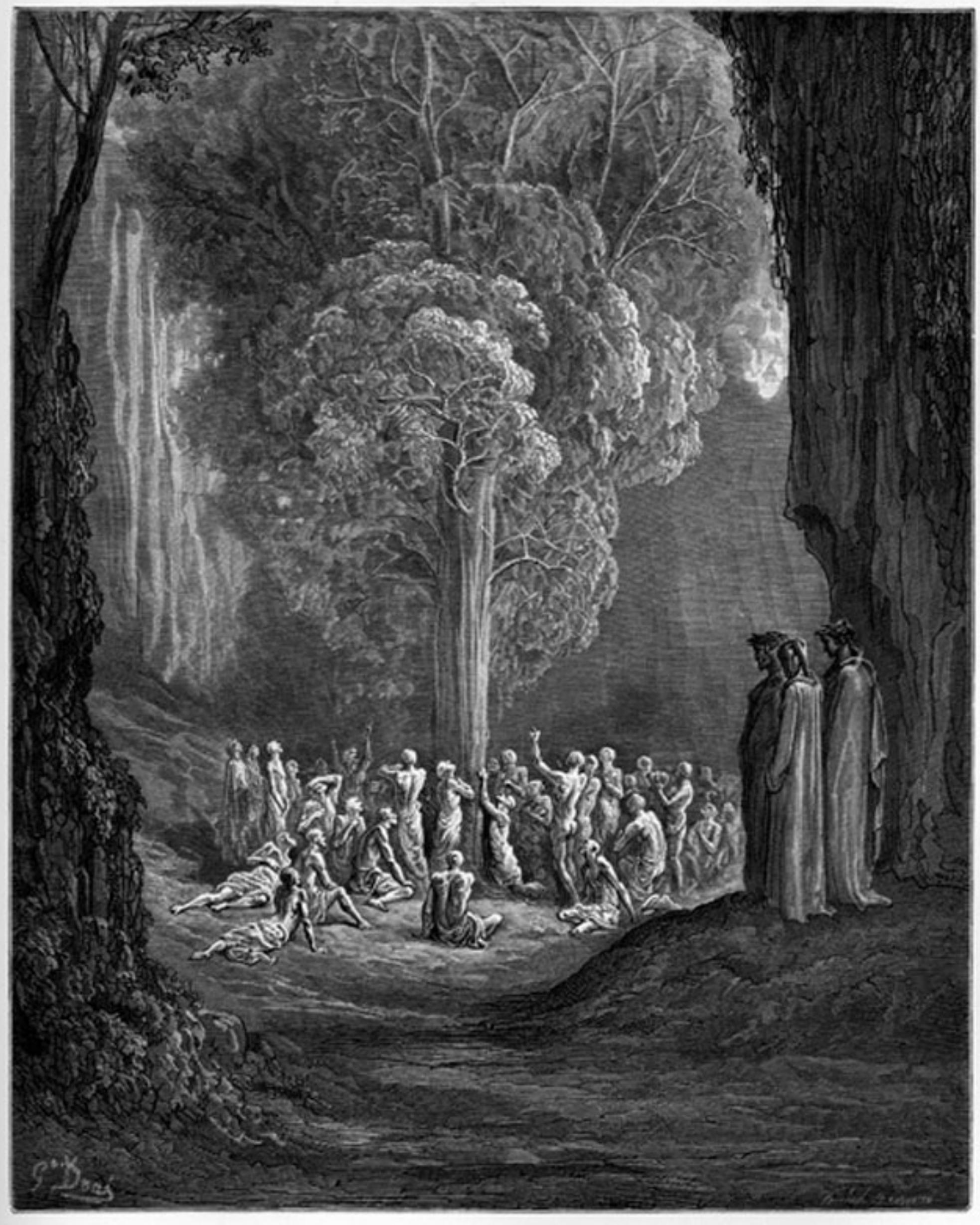
And just as sometimes from a troop of horse a rider will go galloping ahead to win the honour of attacking first so with longer strides he parted from us and I went on my way with those two shades, mighty marshals the world once glorified.

When he had gone so far ahead my eyes strained to follow him even as my mind strained after an understanding of his words. Nearby, the branches of another tree appeared, laden with fruit and thick with green. Beneath it I saw shades with hands up raised, who cried I do not know what beneath the leaves just like greedy empty headed children begging someone who will not answer them but who instead tempting them all the more does not hide but holds high the thing they want.

At last the souls gave up and carried on and we drew closer to that mighty tree which seemed impervious to tears and prayer.

“Pass on and do not come any nearer. Farther up is a tree of which Eve ate and from that tree this one was truly grown. Thus spoke a voice somewhere in the leaves. Drawing closer to each other Virgil, Statius and I moved on hugging the cliff. So keeping close to one side of the road we moved ahead, hearing of gluttony and learned the penalties of those sinners, then walking freely on the lonely path each of us in silence deep in our thoughts, we had taken a thousand paces more when suddenly a voice called out “You three what are you pondering on, alone there!”

I gave a start like some timid beast might and raised my head to see who had spoken, never within a furnace was there seen glass or metal that glowed so radiant as the one I saw who said “To ascend, if you would, turn here. This is the pathway to journey to peace you must pass by here.” Though his brilliance took away my sight I turned and using hearing as a guide continued on after my two teachers and like the herald of the dawning day laden with centre grass and flowers which the May breeze wafts fragrantly so I felt a wind strike soft against my brow and sensed its wings caress. The air’s ambrosia. And then I heard “Blessed are those whose love of taste illuminated so by grace never kindles in them excess desires but allows them hunger for righteousness.”



Canto XXV

Now was the time to climb without a pause. The sun had left the meridian to Taurus and night had left its arc to Scorpio. Therefore like one who moves along his path spurred by necessity and will not halt no matter what necessities we made our way through the narrow entrance. Tiring the stairs one behind the other we started up and as a little stork will lift its wings wanting to fly but will let them drop down not yet bold enough to depart the nest, in me my longing to enquire was so kindled I almost spoke but then was quenched. But my kind father intent on going on and keeping swift our hurried pace said “The iron of the arrow touched the bow of speech. Loose it and let the shaft take flight.” Then I had confidence enough to ask him. “How have they become so thin? Here where is never any need for nourishment.”

“If you remember how Meleager burned “ he said “just as the fire brand was spent, this should not be too hard to understand. Or think when you stand before a mirror as your body moves so does your image. Does this not make things a little clearer? But now to set your anxious mind at peace hear Statius. I call on him and pray that he will be the healer of your doubts.”

“If I explain the eternal ways to him with you here,” said Statius in reply “ let my excuse lie in your appeal.” Then he began “Son, if your mind receives and holds my words then what I say will be a light upon the ‘how’ that troubles you. The perfect blood, the blood that is not drunk by

thirsty veins but like uneaten food left on the table is taken entire acquires within the heart power to form another human shape and limbs, just as blood that flows through veins nourishes one's own, then purified, slows down into that part whose name is best left unspoken. From there it mingles in nature's vessel with another's blood. One is seen passive and one active because their origin, the heart, a perfect place prepare them both. The active and the passive having joined at first coagulate then vivify what was made compact to serve as matter. The active force having become a soul like a plants' soul with the difference that a plant is complete and this begins its journey reaches a stage then where it moves and feels like a sea sponge. Then organs form and organise the powers whose seed it is. It keeps on swelling and spreading out, this force that comes from the begetters heart. So nature may see each limb perfected. But how the animal becomes a man you have not yet seen. At this point where a wiser man than you are fell astray in his doctrine, seeking to separate the possible intellect from the soul since he could see no organ from the mind. Open your heart to the truth you have reached. Know that once the brain's articulation in the embryo has been perfected then the first great mover turns towards it with joy at the art in nature. He breathes into it new spirit, filled with virtue which draws all that is active there into its substance to become a single soul, living, feeling and with self consciousness. If you marvel at what I have to say consider the sun's heat that combined with the sap that flows from the vine become wine. Then when Lachesis has run out of thread the soul slips from the flesh bearing with it both the human and divine in essence with

the basal powers mute but the rest, the memory, the intelligence and the will, more active and keener than before. Without delay it falls marvellously of itself on the one or other shore where it first learns what way to journey. Once the soul is there in that atmosphere the power that gives form radiates round to reshape the limbs the body once had. Just as we see the air heavy with rain ornament itself with diverse colours reflecting the rays that the sun has sent even so the air surrounding the soul must take the form that the soul impresses and then as flame will follow after fire, wherever the fire moves so that new form accompanies the spirit where it goes. Since it derives its semblance from the soul he is called a shade. That shape provides an organ for every sense including sight. This airy body lets us laugh and speak and we can shed the tears and breathe the sighs that you heard perhaps around the mountain. The shade takes on the form of our desires changing with the feeling we may have, this causes the leanness that prompted you.”

By now we were at the final turning but taking the pathway on our right hand our minds were occupied by other cares. Fire was flashing from the mountain wall while wind blasting up from the terrace repelled the flames, so leaving a narrow pathway along the open side which one by one we were forced to walk.

On the left I feared the flames and on the right the precipice. My guide said “In this place keep a tight rein on your eyes. The least distraction may mean a step that you will regret.”

Then I heard “Summae Deus clementiae” being sung in the heart of the great blaze. Which made me want to look even more and walking in the flames I saw spirits there. I gazed at them and at my feet sharing the moment I had to look with each pace. After they had sung the hymn to its end, they cried out loudly, “Virum non cognosco;” and softly they began the hymn again.

When it was finished they cried out “Diana kept to the woods and banished Helice who had felt the thrill of Venus’ poison” Then they began to sing the hymn again and done praise the lout chaste couples who did as virtue in matrimony require. They act in this way, I think, these souls, while the fire holds them. The care and nourishment of flames and hymns which they endure sustains them until the last of all their wounds is healed.

Canto XXIX

While we walked the edge in single file, and I from time to time heard my sweet guide say gently “I warn you take care!” The sun shone on the shoulder from the right, its rays now almost level altering the colour of the western sky from azure to white.

My shadow falling on the flames made them seem to glow a deeper red. I noticed even the slight evidence caused many souls to marvel at such a sight as they passed. And it was this prompted the spirits of speak of me. “He does not seem to have a shadow body.” They said to each other and certain of them cautiously approached as close as they were able to without leaving the burning boundaries of flame. “O you moving behind the other two, not because of sloth but from reverence answer me who pleads here in thirst and fire. Yours words will not satisfy me alone for all these shades thirst for it, more than an Indian or Ethiopian thirsts for cool water. Tell us how you can make a wall of yourself against the sun as if you had yet escaped death’s net.” So said a voice to me. Had I not fixed then on something else I would again have revealed myself. Along the flaming road coming the opposite way to these were another band of souls. I stopped, amazed from either side the souls made haste to kiss each other. And yet they did not linger but seemed satisfied with this brief greeting as ants in their black battalions touch muzzles each to each as if enquiring after news of journeying so fortune. As soon as friendly greetings are given even before the next step is taken each one attempts to out shout the rest with new

souls crying “Sodom and Gomorrah!” the next “Pasiphae enters the cow that the young bull will rush to mount her lust!” Then those shades who had first intruded me drew close in the same way they had done before, their faces showing eagerness to hear. Seeing the desire appear again I said “O you souls who are assured of gaining a stage of peace whenever that may be, no limbs of mine green or mature remain below on earth. I have them here with me. This flesh is real, complete with blood and bones. I climb to cure my blindness. A lady above has gained grace for me which is why I may bear this mortal weight through your world. But so your deepest need will soon be appeased and you sheltered by heaven’s greatest sphere filled full with love, please tell me who you are so I may transcribe it in my pages and whoever crowd which moves against you.”

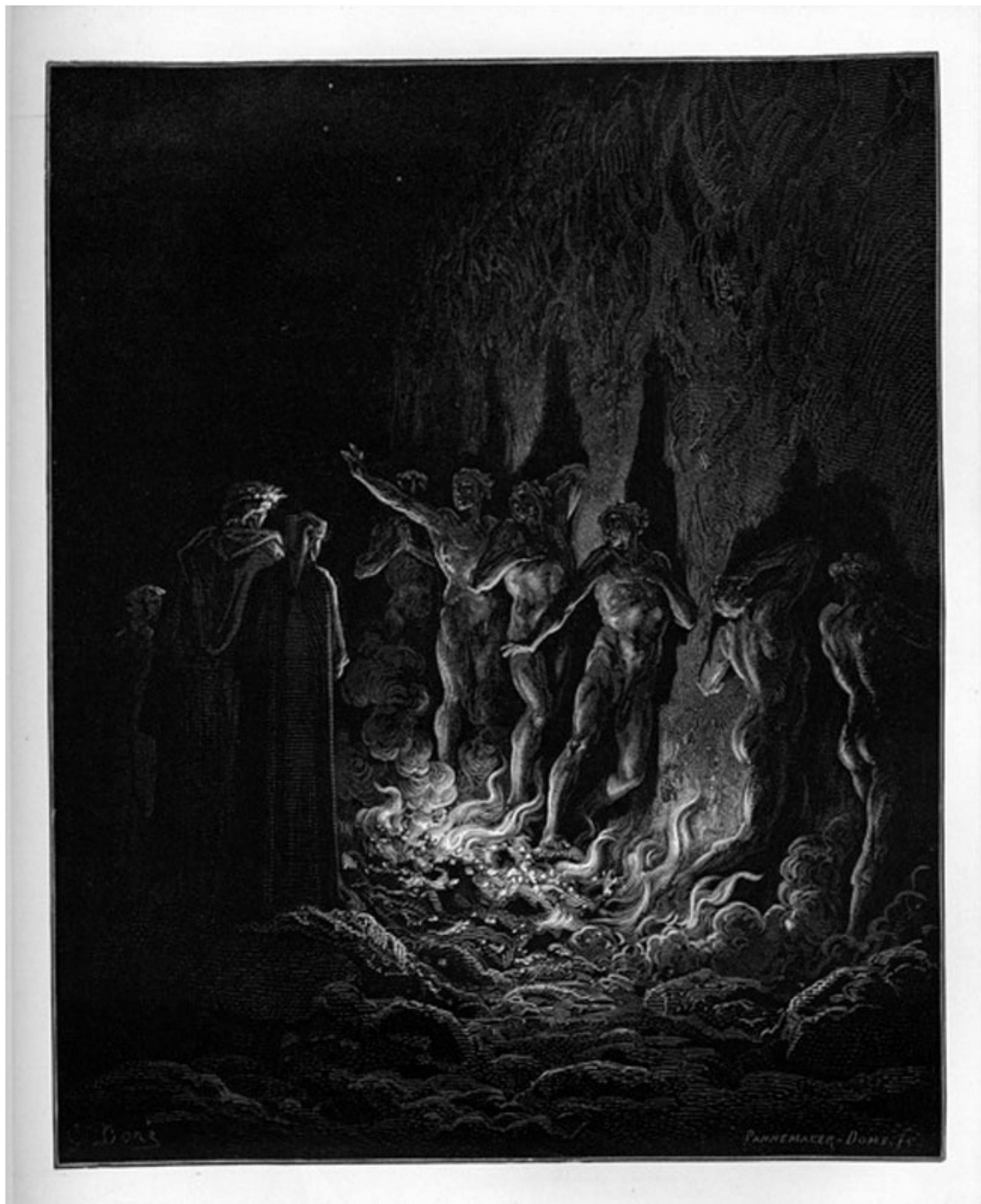
Each spirit showed no less astonishment or confusion than when a mountain man rude and rustic come new to the city falls silent as he stares around him amazed. Once they had set aside their bewilderment that is noble hearts quickly subdued, he who questioned me earlier began “Blessed are you who to die better would store the experiences of these shores. The people moving in opposition share the sin for which Caesar as he passed in triumph heard “Queen” called out against him, hence they cry “Sodom!” as they move away as a reproach to themselves as you heard and with their shame intensify the fire. Our foulness was sin with the other sex but since we broke the bounds of human law and yielding served our lust like animals when we part from the other souls we

shout to our disgrace, the shameful name of she who in beast's form bestialised herself. Now you know our guilt and why we act so. As for our names I do not know them all and anyways time is too short. For me I will satisfy your wish to know. I am Guido Guinicelli, here so quickly because I grieved long before my end came."

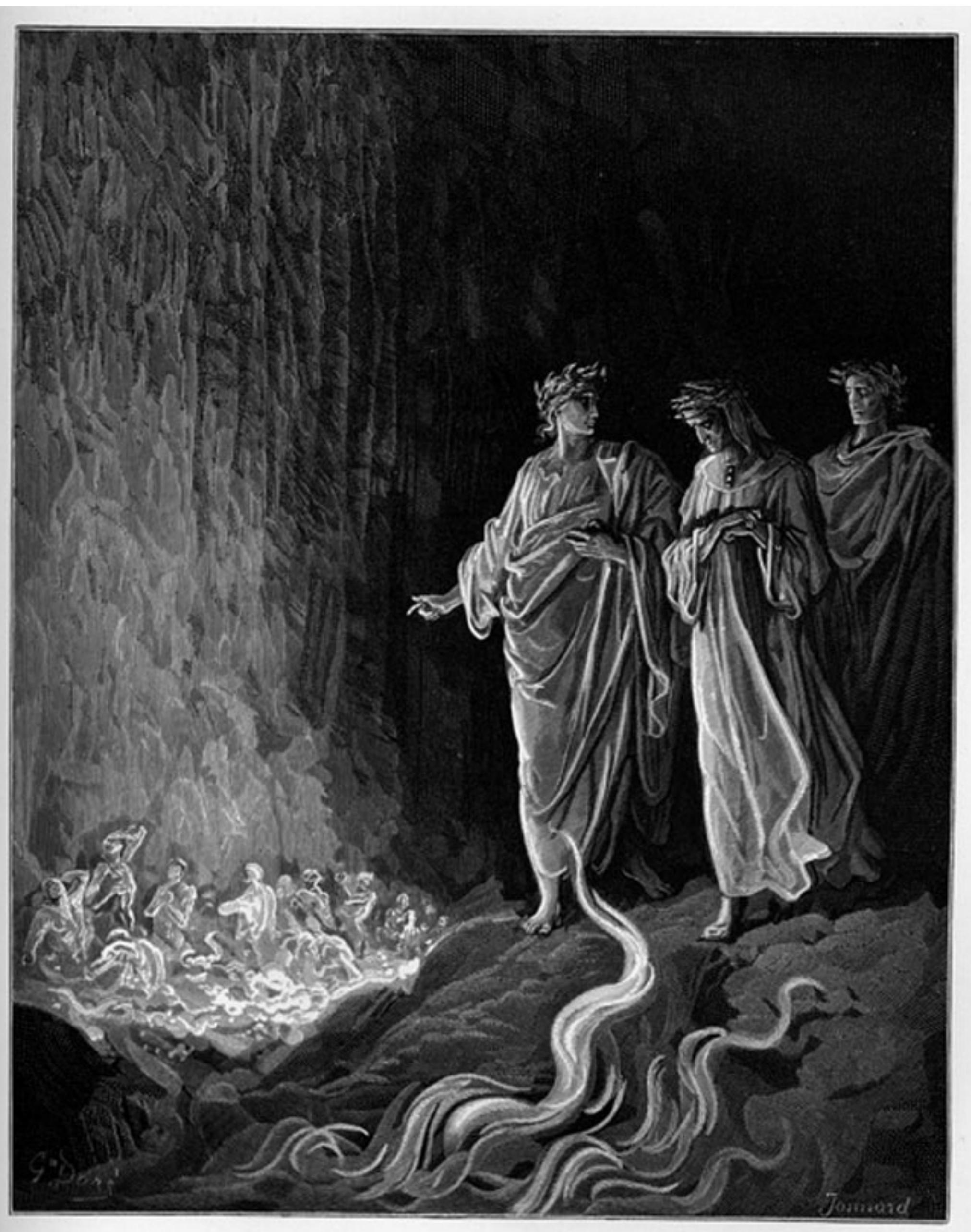
Just as while King Lycurgus raged with grief two sons discovering their mother rushed to embrace her so when I heard his name the father of me and all my betters who wrote sweet and gracious verses of love I too desired but dared not. Without hearing anymore or speaking I walked on, pensive, gazing at his shade but kept from drawing closer by the flames. At last my gaze was satisfied. I spoke and told him then my wish to serve him. "Your sweet poem has moved me" I said to him "and as long as the present tongue endures will make precious the very ink you used." "My brother," he said "I can show you now" and pointed to spirit up ahead "a better craftsman of the mother tongue than all who wrote their poetry of love or romances in prose. How foolish they who believe that the best came from Lemosin. They credit reputation not the truth allowing their opinion to be formed without hearing what art or reason says." Then making place perhaps for those behind he disappeared into the fire, much as a fish diving deeper fades out of sight. Telling him that my desire made ready a place of welcome for his name, I moved up toward the shade just indicated. He spoke freely and with grace. "Your requests, courteously given, so pleases me I neither could nor would conceal myself. I am Arnaut. Signing through my tears as I walk. Former follies I recall

with grief. With joy I see the day draw near. I implore by
that goodness which takes you to the summit of the stair.
When the time is right be mindful of my suffering. “

Then he hid in the refining fire.



Canto XXVII



When the sun with his first rays of light hails the place where once the maker shed his blood, and Ebro flows beneath the lofty scales while the Ganges boils under noon day sun, so he stood now. Here the day was fading as God's joyful Angel appeared to us. He stood beyond the flames upon the bank singing "Beati mundo corde," in voice with more life than we can claim. Once he moved closer to him he said "Holy souls you can go on no further without first suffering the fire. Enter and do not be deaf to the song you hear"

I became like one buried in his grave. I clasped my hands in protest leaning close and staring into the fire recalling bodies that I had once seen burnt to death. My gentle escorts turned towards t and Virgil said "My son though there may be torment here there is no death. Remember, remember if alone I guided you to the safely of back of Geryon then what shall I do now nearer to God. Believe me if you spend a thousand years within this flame not a hair would be harmed and if you think me guileful still. Come close, approach the fire self. Put in your robe, touch it with the hem. Throw down by now, throw down your every fear. Turn to the fire, enter with confidence."

But stubbornly I stood torn by conscience. Perplexed when he saw me still standing there he said "Don't you see my son only this wall of flame stands between you and Beatrice"

As at the whispered name of Thisbe the dying Pyramus opened his eyes and saw her, the day mulberries turn red.

So all my stubbornness became softness on hearing the name which blooms for ever in my mind.

And I turned then to my guide and he shook his head and smiled just as one might as a child beguiled by an apple and said “How now? Shall we stay on this side then?”

So he entered into the flames infant and asked Statius would walk between us for sometime that he bring up the rear. Once within the fire I would have gladly thrown myself into molten glass to find cool relief from the flame’s intensity. My gentle father ever kind and wise encouraged me repeating Beatrice’s name and saying “I can almost see Her eyes”

The path we took climbed straight up through the rock at such an angle that my shadow fell before me from the last rays of the sun. Barely had we climbed the first few steps when my two guides and I knew sunset had come since the shadow I had cast just disappeared. But before one colour permeated the horizon’s vast expanse a night took possession of the sky, each one of us made the step he stood on into a bed. The nature of the mountain so weakened our power and desire to climb ahead. From there little of the sky could be seen but in that space I could see stars, brighter and larger than they are usually.

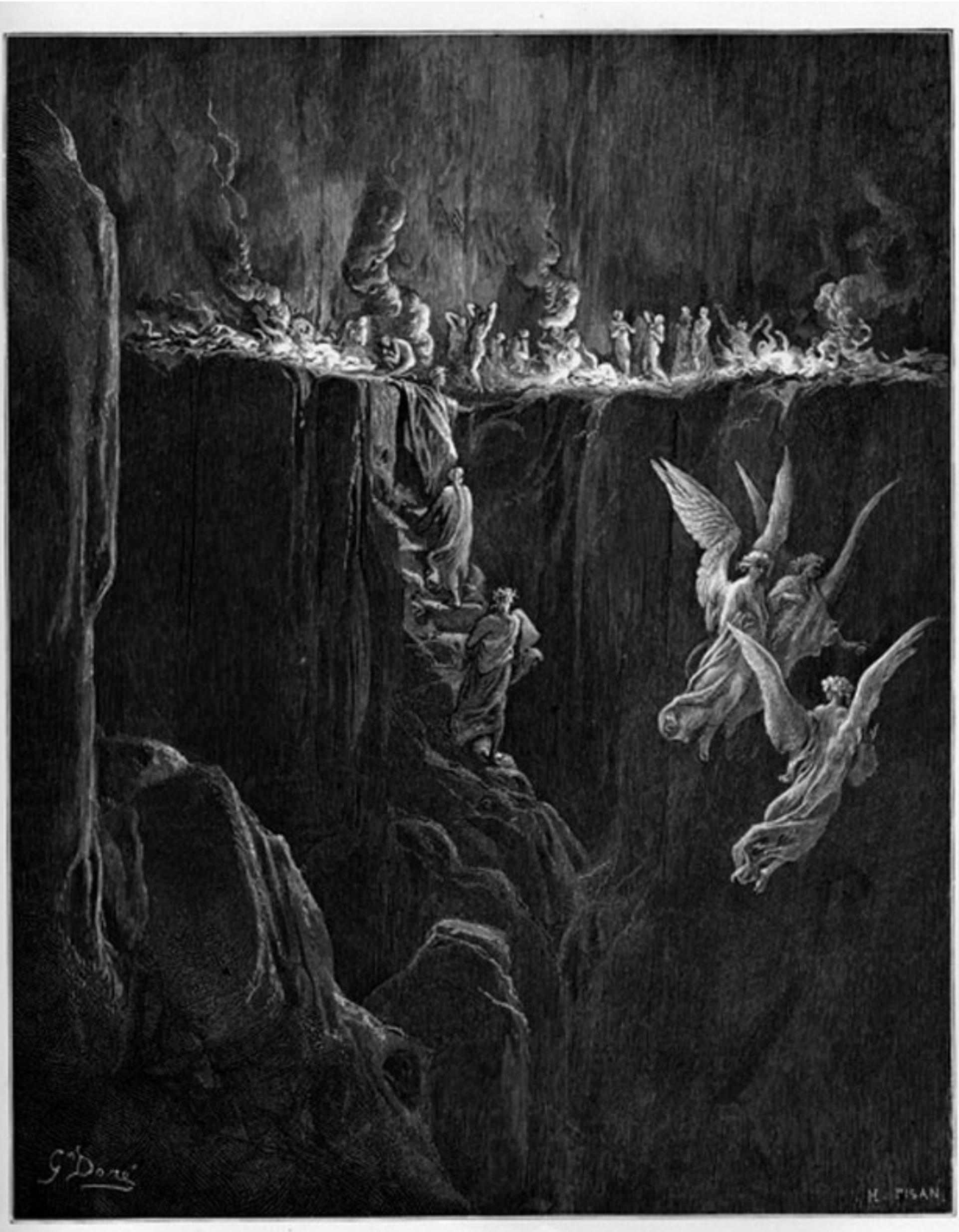
While I watched the stars in my revelry sleep overcame me. Sleep, which often sees before it happens what is yet to come. Around the hour when Citherea who always seems to burn with love’s own flame first sent her eastern rays to

the mountain, I dreamed. And In my dream it seemed I saw a woman young and beautiful who was gathering flowers along the plain and seeing as she went. Whoever asks it “My name is Leah” she said. With my hands I fashioned a garland of the flowers for my hair to please me in the mirror. My sister Rachel does not stir from hers . She loves to contemplate her lovely eyes. Action pleases me, she prefers to look.”

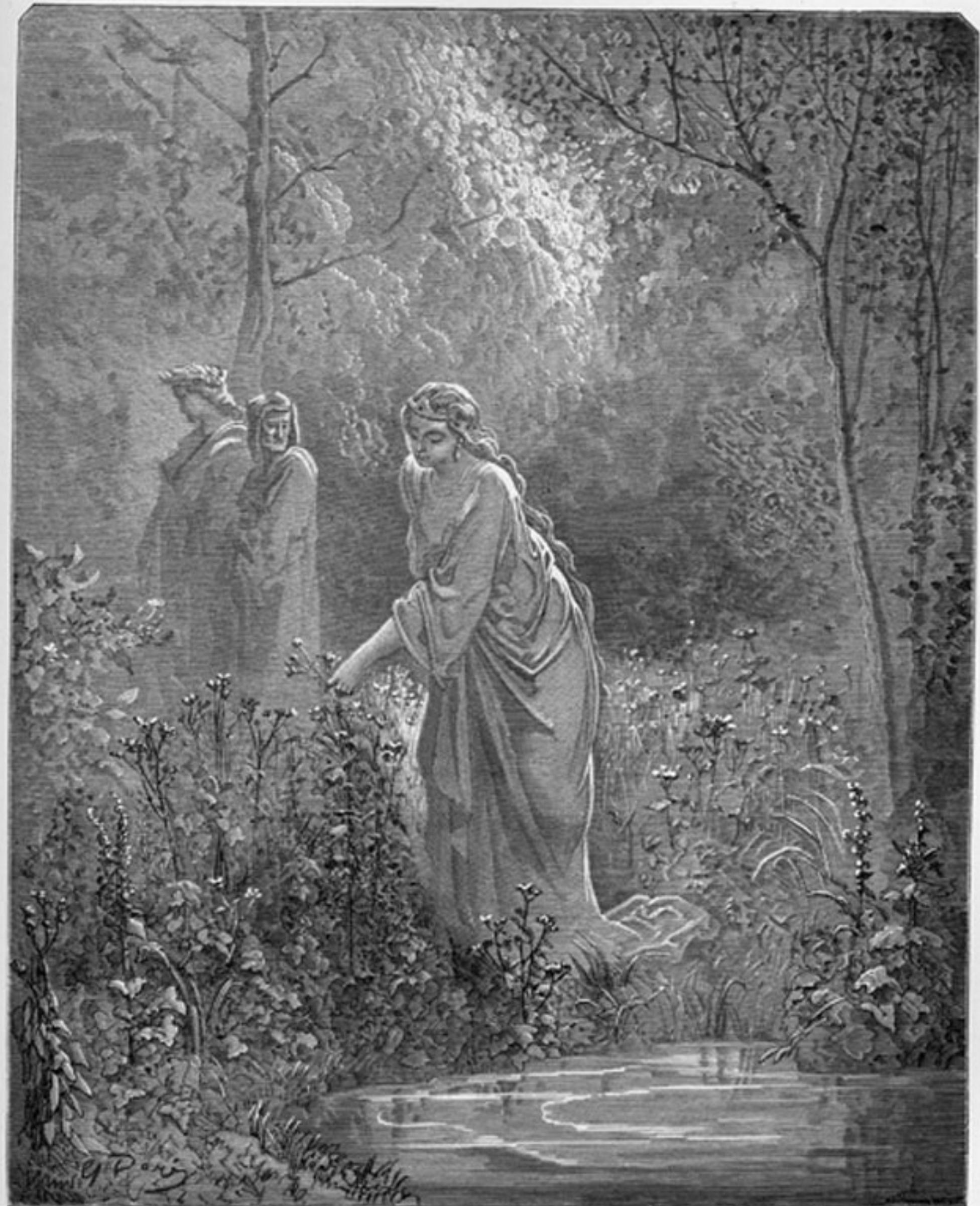
And now before the splendour of the dawn welcomed the more by the home bound pilgrim with everyday he wakes closer to home, the shadows fled on every side. My sleep fled with them. I woke and rose seeing that my teachers had already risen. “Today that sweet fruit which all men search for on so many different branches will give peace to the hunger in your soul.” Virgil spake these solemn words to me. No tidings ever compared in offering delight. Desire came on me, desire on desire to be above and with each step I took, I felt force growing my wings for the flight.

When all the stairway laid beneath us and we had reached the topmost step Virgil gazed at me intent and said “My son, you have seen temporal fire and eternal. You have arrived at the place beyond which my powers cannot see. My wit and skill brought you here. From now on let your pleasure guide you, now free of narrow ways and steep. Look at the sun which shines upon your brow. See the grasses, flowers and the bushes that the earth produces here of itself. Rest here among them or wander freely while you wait for the glad and lovely eyes, those eyes that

weeping sent me to your side. Wait no longer for words or signs from me. Your will has become free, upright and whole, not to the its pleasure would be to err. I crown and miter you Lord of yourself”



Canto XXVIII



Eager to search within and all around that Divine forest alders alive with green which tempered the new day before my eyes I did not linger on the mountain's edge but took the plain going slowly, slowly on ground that breathed fragrance of delight. A breeze which seemed to blow unvarying struck at my brow but with no greater force than the gentlest air and made the branches tremble. They all bent eagerly towards where the holy mountain first casts shadow but not so much as to disturb the song birds practicing their art among the leaves. By now although my steps were slow I found that I had gone so far within the ancient wood I could no longer see where I had come in. And here blocking my path there run stream with every little wave bending towards the left the grass that grew along its banks. The purest waters on the earth would seem tainted by impurity matched with it. It conceals nothing that holy stream though it flows darkly dark beneath the shadows that fall eternal over it never letting a moonbeam or ray of sun. I halted then but my eyes set upon the farther bank to stare in wonder at the abundance of newly flowers bows when like a thing that comes so suddenly and brings such great astonishment that drives out all other thoughts there appeared a solitary lady gathering flowers from those that painted the ground before her.

“Lovely lady you who glow with love’s rays if I may trust your looks which so often bear witness to the heart, may it please you to come a little closer to this steam so I may understand the words you sing?”

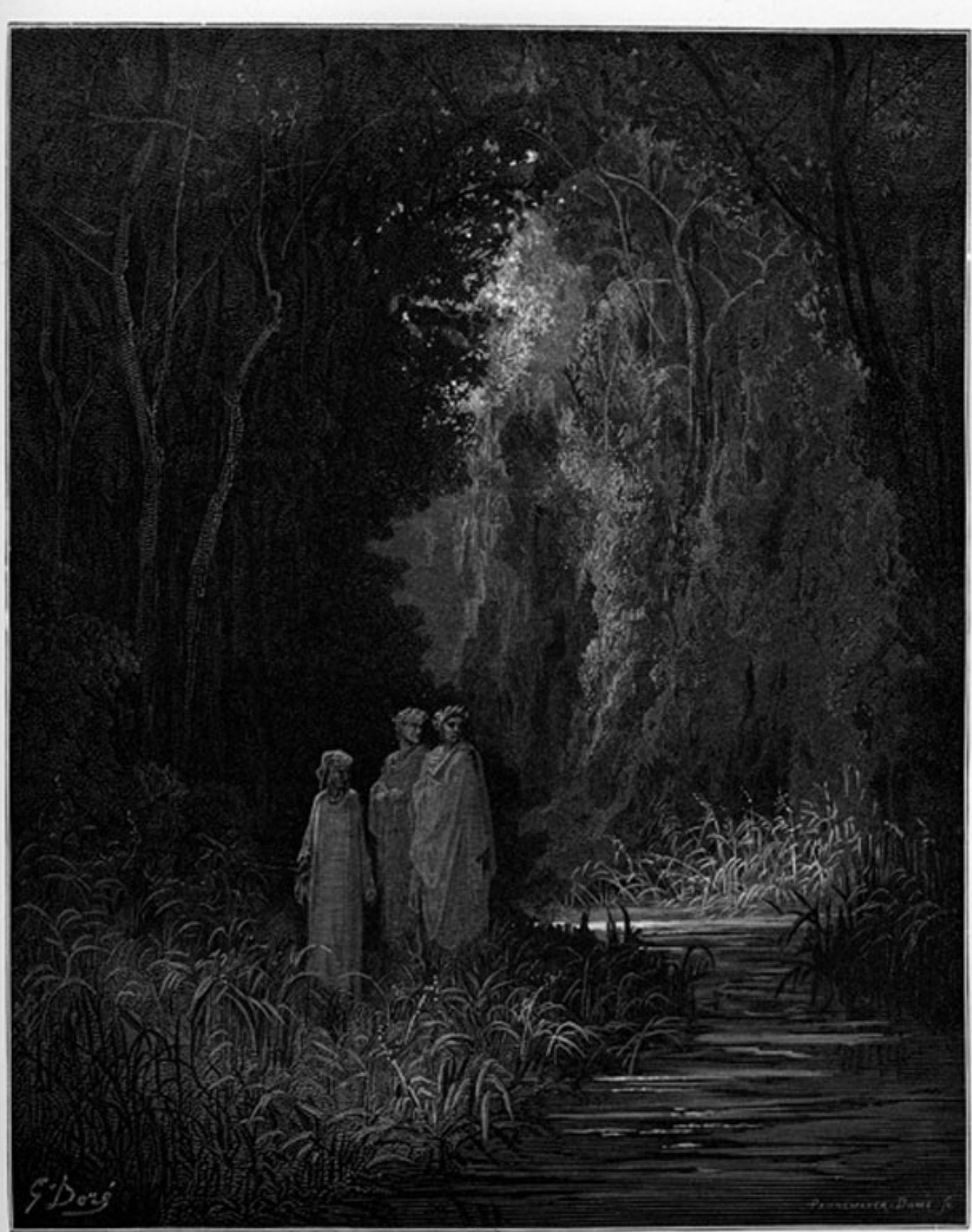
As a woman in the dance spins her feet together scarcely lifted off the ground, one foot just preceding the other, so among the red and yellow flowers she turned towards me chastely lowering her eyes as a modest maid would do. She approached the stream so that her melody reached me and all its meaning sounded in my ear. When she had gained the spot where tender grass was bathed by ripples from that fair river she graciously raised her eyes meeting mine. Never think did light more radiant shine from Venus's eyes when here loving son innocently pierced her with his arrow. Smiling she stood there on the farther bank hands intwined around multi coloured flowers which that highland engenders without seed.

“You are newcomers” so she began “and perplexed perhaps to find me smiling here in this place, once the cradle of mankind. But let the words of the psalm beginning ‘Delectasti’ clear the mists away that cloud your mind. And you who stepped forward and spoke to me if there is something more I come here prepared for all your questions.”

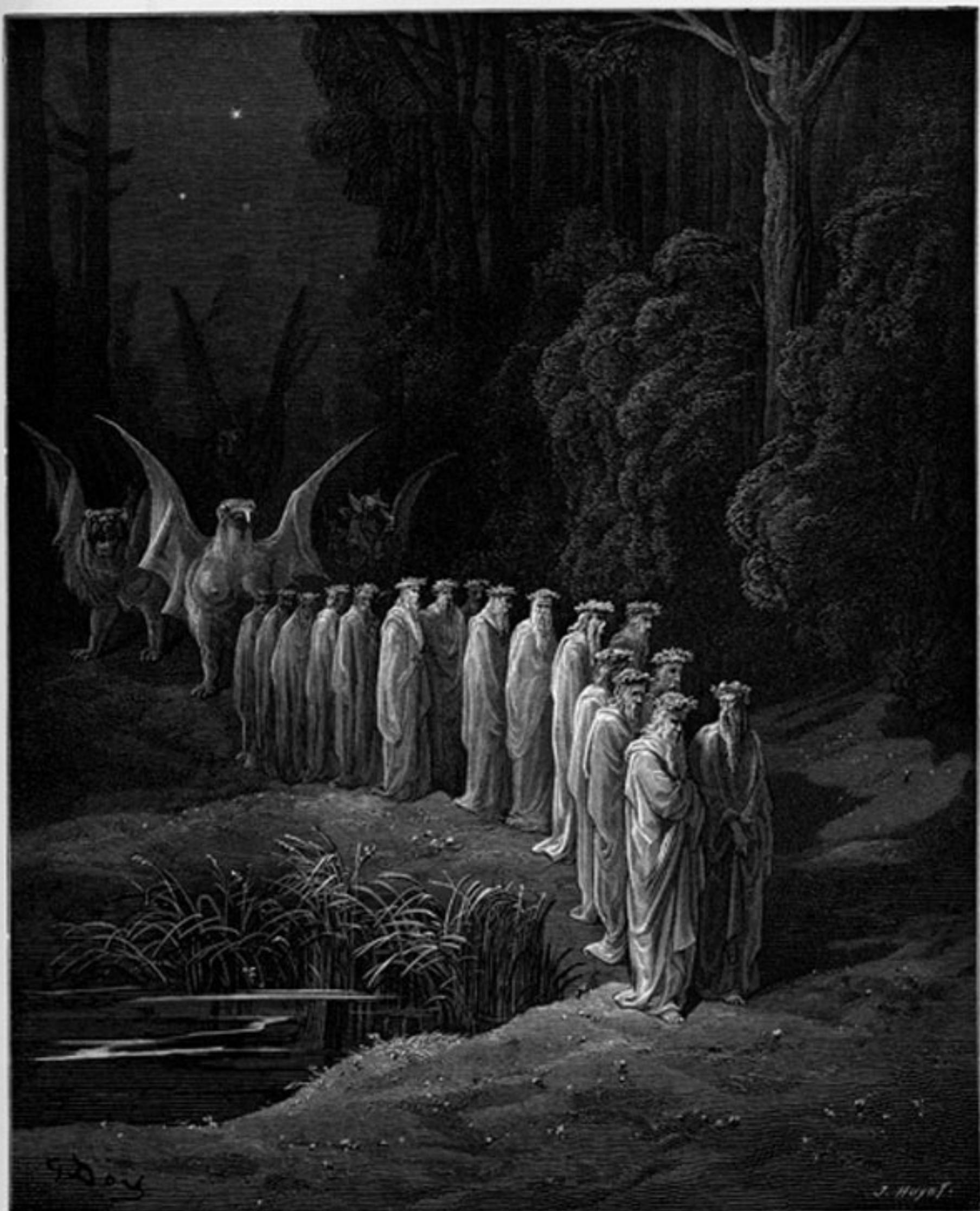
“The flowing water and the forest’s sounds seem to contradict what I have been told about the mountain.” I began. At this she said “Your amazement has special cause. And I shall explain what perplexes you. The highest good who so joys himself made Adam good for goodness sake. Then gave man this place as a pledge of endless peace. Through his own fault man’s sojourn here was brief. His own fault exchanged laughter and sweet grace for hard toil and grief and lamentation. And so that the storms which

come from the vapours of each and water rising to the sun would not disturb the garden's peacefulness, the mountain was lifted close to heaven. No tempest is possible past the gate. Now since the air is in constant movement moving as the primary circle moves unless its round is broken at some point when the mountain's height standing free in the encircling air is struck, that motion echoes in these dense woods and sets the leaves singing. Every smitten plant impregnates the air with its own virtue. The air revolving scatters wide this seed in the hemisphere below where spending on the nature of climate and soil it conceives and bears different plants and different powers. Where what I said well known below on earth, there would be no wonder at growing things that root but were not sown from any seed and know the holy land on which you stand is rich in every seed bringing forth fruit that no man on earth has ever gathered. This water here does not spring from any source that moisture condensed by cold restores like rivers on earth that lose or gain their force but issues from pure and constant font which by the will of God regains as much as it pours forth freely on either side. On this side the stream flows with a power to erase the memory of sin for men. On that memory of good deeds is recalled. This is called Lethe that side Eunoe. Neither stream will act unless the waters of the other stream have been tasted first. There sweetness excels any other taste. Those ancient poets who sang long ago of the age of gold and its happy state perhaps in their Parnassus dreamt this place. Mankind's root was innocent here and here in never spring ending spring was every fruit. This was the nectar of which the poets sang."

As she spoke I turned around to my poets and saw by their smiles that they had heard her. Then I turned to face that lovely woman.



Canto XXIX



With her speech at and end she then began to speak like a lady moved by love. And like those nymphs who once would stroll alone amongst those woodland shadows some seeking to flee the sun others seeking its light so she began to walk along the bank going against the current.

I kept pace matching her small graceful steps on my side. We had gone less than a hundred paces when the banks still parallel curved about so that I was facing to the East again. Nor had we gone much further on the path when she stopped and turning towards me said “Dear brother look and listen!” and I saw a sudden flowing burst of radiance light up the mighty forest on all sides. I thought it was a lightening flash first but lighting is gone even as it strikes. This remained, its radiance increasing. What can this be? I wondered to myself as a sweet melody came drifting through the luminous air at which righteous zeal made me rebuke the arrogance of Eve. How this solitary woman, new maid, when all the earth and heaven obeyed Him found any veil beyond her endurance. Had she remained submissive and devout I should have savoured those delights before and stayed among them for a longer time. O my sacred virgins! if I suffered for your sake bearing hunger, cold or vigil allow me now ask for recompense. Let Helicon pour out fountains for me and Urania aid me to acquire to put in words such hard things to conceive.

A little way off we saw what it seemed to be seven trees of gold. A false appearance caused by our distance from them. Drawing close, near enough that their real features

were clear no longer blurred by deluded senses, the power that offers reason judged them to be candlesticks. And the words of the singing to be ‘Hosanna’. Above the gold burnt flames more brilliant and more radiant than midnight moonlight shining in untroubled mid month sky.

“Why so eager to see the living lights and not to observe what comes after them?” The woman chided me and then I saw following the candles as if they were attending on them people wearing white, a white our world has never seen. On my left the water shone with the flames and as I looked at it like a mirror I saw it reflect in my left side too. When I had reached the point along my bank where only water separated us I halted to watch them more carefully. And I could see the candle flames advance. Streaking the air behind them with colour and till it appeared like waving penance and made the air above that company stream with seven bands of light. The colours of the rainbow and of Delia's girdle. These stretched back beyond where my eyes could see and measured side by side some ten paces beneath this magnificence preceeding, two by two, came twenty four elders crowned with flower-de-luce and all singing “Blessed are thou of Adam's daughters and blessed be your eternal beauty.”

When the group of Gods chosen few had passed leaving the sweet flowers and tender grass that shone along the bank before me as stars would follow star in heaven there then came four creatures crowned with forest green each with six wings for plumage, pinions which were covered over with eyes. If Argus were still alive his eyes would be

like those. The space between the four of them contained a triumphal chariot on two wheels, harnessed to a Griffin and drawn by him. His wings rose so high they were lost to sight. And the paths that were bird shone like gold while all the rest was white marked with deep red. Three women dancing in around advanced by the right wheel. The first of them so red that she would barely be seen in a fire. The second seemed as if her flesh and bone were fashioned of emeralds. The third there looked to have the hue of fresh fallen snow. Now the white one seemed to lead and now the red and from the way in which the leader sang the others took their pace now fast now slow. Beside the left wheel dancing in a flame of purple robes and led by one who had three eyes in her head came four happy nymphs. There came two elders dressed differently but like in manner, grave and reverent. One wore the clothing of the disciple of great Hypocrites whom nature made to sucker the dearest creatures to her. The other with a sharp and glittering blade showed an opposite concern. I felt fear even on the farther side of the stream. After these, four with a humble aspect and lastly a solitary old man moved as if in sleep his face wrapped with dreams. These seven were clad like the group of four except this band had no lily garlands but roses and red flowers ran their brow. One would have to swear seeing them afar a crown of flames encircled every head. When the chariot was opposite me I heard a thunder clap as if commanded by those high souls in grace. They stopped short then as did the fiery emblems at their head.



Canto XXX

When the seven stars of the first heaven which never set or rise and are not veiled except when our vision is clouded by sin, halting, showed everyone their duty there just as the bear brings helmsmen home to port. That company of bearers of the truth who were between the Griffin and those lights turned to the car as to their source of peace. And one of them as sent from heaven sang aloud “Veni, sponsa, de Libano” three times and the other voices followed. As at the final trumpet the blessed will rise out of their graves ready to sing ‘Hallelujah’ in voices newly fleshed so from the godly chariot heralds of eternal life, ministers of God then arose. One hundred souls all crying out at the voice of so great an elder “Benedictus qui venis” and string flowers in the air and all around “Manibus o date lilia planes”.

Sometimes at the arrival of the dawn I have seen the sky turn rose in the East with the rest of heaven serene in blue. And the sun’s rising face so tempered by a misty veil, the eye could endure to look on it at length. So within a cloud of flowers cast high by angelic hands to show a downwards chariot came a lady wearing a white veil crowned with olive leaves, her cloak was green, her gown beneath coloured the red of living flame.

Though many years had passed since I had stood within her presence, trembling, adoring and though she was veiled and my soul could not see her clearly, I felt her hidden force and the great power of enduring love. As

soon as that virtue had struck my eyes, high virtue, that when I had not yet left my boyhood had already pierced me through. I turned round into my left as a child afraid or in distress might run into mother's safe arms to say to Virgil 'There is not one drop of blood that does not tremble in me'. I know the flame of old.

But Virgil had deprived himself of us. He was not there. Virgil, gentle father, to whom I gave my soul for salvation. Even the delights our first mother lost could not keep my cheeks though once washed with dew from darkening with tears again.

"Dante, though Virgil leaves, do not weep yet. Not yet. There is another wound that you shall weep for."

At the sound of my name, I turned around and saw the lady who had first appeared beneath the veils of angelic flowers looking towards me from across the stream. Just as an admiral in bow or stern watches the officers who guide the ships encouraging them at their labours she stood at the left side of the chariot. Though the veil she wore flowing from her head circled by Minerva's leaves did not let me view her clearly I sensed her regal and disdainful stand as she spoke like someone who keeps back the sharpest words till the end.

"Look well, for I am Beatrice. How did you dare to ascend the Mountain? Did you not know that here man is happy?"

I cast my eyes down to the crystal stream but when I saw myself reflected there my shame forced me to draw away and look towards the meadow. Just as to the child the mother seems harsh so did she to me. How bitter is the taste of stern pity. She ceased then and the Angels suddenly launched into the psalm that's starts. "In te, Domine, speravi:" up to 'pedes meos'.

As snow along the spine of Italy frozen in among the living rafters blown by bleak north eastern winds melts trickling through itself and dissolving with the wind that blows from a land without mid day shade like the flame beneath which the candle melts, so I before I had heard the song of those whose notes accompany the sound of the eternal spheres was without tears and sighs but when I heard their gentle sympathy for me within the subtle harmonies as though they said 'Why shame him so lady?' then the eyes that clutched at my heart melted becoming water and breath and from my breast anguish issued through my lips and my eyes.

Still standing immobile on the left side of the chariot She spoke addressing the angels who had been compassionate "You are awake in the eternal day. Neither night nor sleep can conceal from you one step for world may make along its way. Though I speak to you my concern is he who weeps at his sorrow may match his sin. Not only through the working of the spheres which guide each seed to its determined end depending on its companion stars but also through the bounty of God's graces which shower down from cloud so high above, they cannot be discerned with

our vision. He when young had such potential in him that any propensity would have bloomed had he acted. But the richer the soil the wilder it grows with weeds if untilled. For a while my countenance sustained him. He looked into my youthful eyes I let him with me along the righteous pathway but when I passed into my second age and changed my life he took himself away pursuing others abandoning me. Then when I rose up from flesh to spirit and my goodness and my beauty had grown I was less dear to him and less pleasing. His steps wandered aside on a fool's path. He followed false images of goodness which never pay their promises in full. Nor did he heed the inspirations that through dreams and otherwise I called to him. He fell so far there were no other means for his salvation except this that he should see before his eyes those who were damned. For this I visited the gates of death and offered my prayers even as I wept to the one who led him on his journey. The high decree of God would have been broken if Lethe had been crossed and he had drunk its sweet waters but not discharged the debt of penitence poured forth when tears are shed."

Canto XXXI

“You on the far side of the holy stream!” she said without pause turning her speech’s point on me the edge of which seemed sharp enough. “Is this not true? Speak now. Your confession here must be sealed by self accusation.”

My power of speech was confounded. My voice would move yet was spent before its organs had released it. She paused for a moment. “What are you thinking?” She said “Answer me! The stream has not yet purged your sad memories.”

Confusion and fear combined to force a yes from my mouth. So faintly that only with eyes as well could one have understood. Just as a cross bow drawn too taught will snap both cord and bow together and the shaft will meet its target with a feeble force I caught beneath the heavy burden broke and let a stream of tears and sighs pour out while my voice died away in its passage. “In your desire of me” I heard her say “which was leading you to the door of the good beyond which there is nothing to aspire, what chains were strung, what pitfalls dug across your path that coming on them you felt forced to give up any hope of moving on. What allurements enticed? What benefits appeared so clearly showed on the forehead of the others that you were obliged to wander among them?”

After heaving a bitter sigh my voice could scarcely manage a reply. My lips formed a response with difficulty.

“The fine show of things and appearances forced loveliness mislead me as soon as your face was no longer there.” I said. “Had you kept silent or denied what you confess your guilt would be as clear.” She said. “To such a judge all faults are manifest. But when sinfulness is freely coming from one’s own cheek then in our court the crimes don’t turn back to blunt the blade edge. Nevertheless, so you may feel more shame and will be stronger here in the sirens in time to come, be now done with tears and listen. Learn how my buried flesh was meant to guide you to other ends. You never soar in nature or in art any beauty that matched the form now dust in which I was once clothed. And if that perfect beauty disappeared through my death how could a mortal thing induce desire? With the first arrow of deception sting you ought to have flown to follow me. Wings no longer weighed down by some pretty girl nor other brief vanity leaving you waiting for another blow. A fledgling waits for two blows or three before he learns. But not the full fledged bird. Before his eyes the arrow is aimed, the net spread in vain.”

How scolded children stand ashamed, silent, eyes to the ground acknowledging their fault, so I stood and she said “Since hearing alone causes you so much grief lift up your beard and look and suffer greater grief.”

There is less resistance from the steady oak to uprooting by a gail in our land or storms that blow in the lands of the Iarbas than I showed in lifting up my chin. When she named my beard but meant my face then I knew the venom of her argument. And when I lifted up my face I

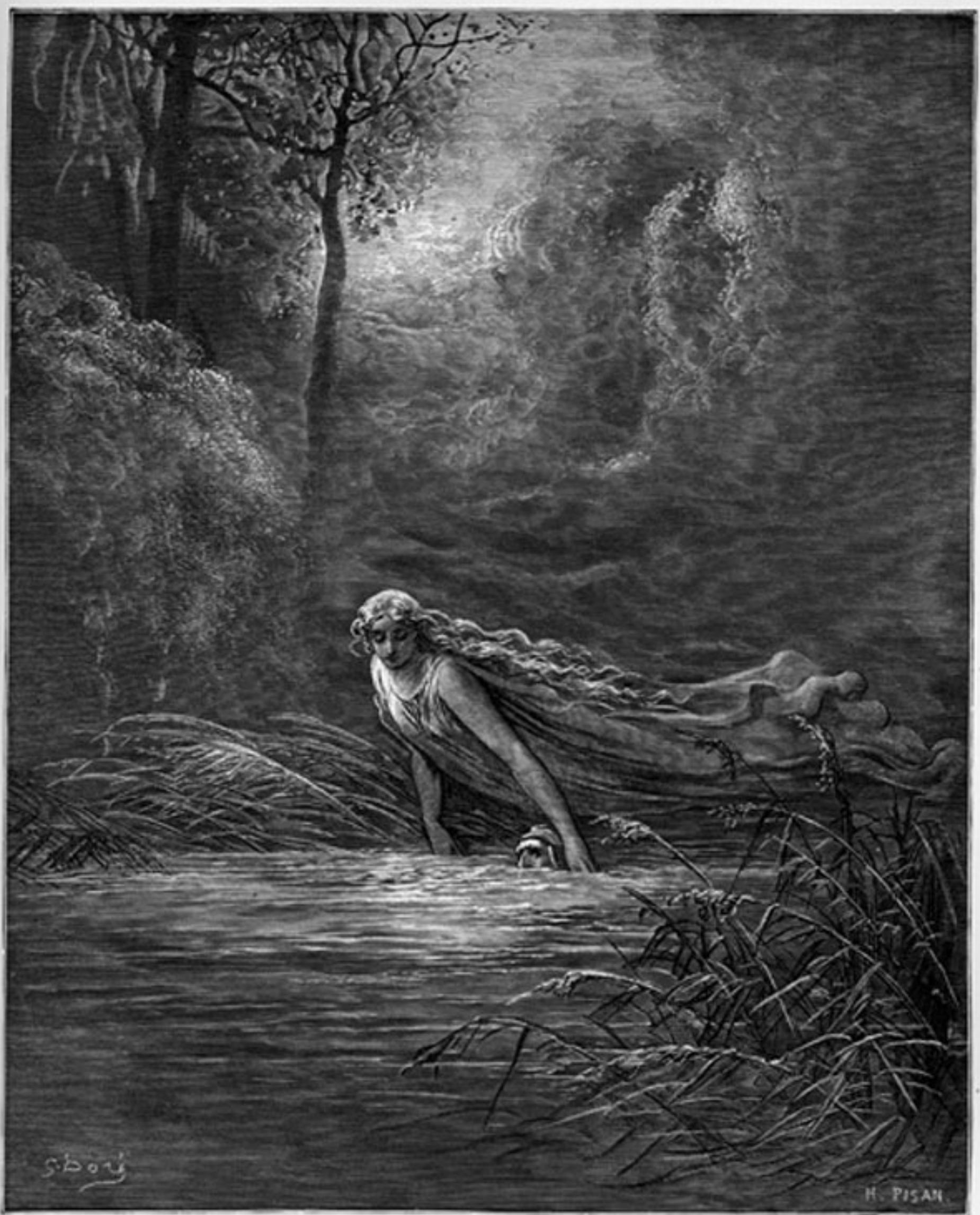
looked not at her but at those first created and so there were no longer stream flowers. Then as I turned my gaze uncertain still I saw that Beatrice faced the animal with two natures combined in one being. Though veiled and on the farther shore she seemed to me more lovely than her former self on earth where she was loveliest of all. The nettle of repentance so stung me that those earthly things that once had the most allure for me were now the most hated of all. Such great remorse gnawed at my heart. I felt prostrate and a faint. What happened after is known only to her the cause of it.

When my heart restored me to my senses I saw the lady whom I had found alone leaning over me saying "Hold me fast, hold me!" She had plunged me up to the throat in the river and was drawing me behind her while she glided us light as any shuttle on the surface of the flood. Coming close to the blessed shore I heard "Asperges me" sung so sweetly my mind cannot recall it, much less speak of it. The lovely woman opening her arms clasped my head and dipped me under the stream so deep I was forced to swallow water. That done, she drew me out and let me bathe into the dancing of the four women where each one raised an arm above my head. "Here we are nymphs, in heaven stars. Before she knew the world we were ordained handmaids of Beatrice to serve and love her. We will guide you to her eyes but the three beyond who see more deeply. They will help you in penetrating the joyous light."

So then singing they began to lead me towards the griffin's breast where Beatrice stood facing us from the chariot.

“See now!” they sang “and do not spare your sight. You stand now before those emeralds from which love once aimed is loving arrows at your heart.” And while my soul amazed and full of joy tasted that food which while it satisfies the hunger wets the appetite anew, there came, dancing forward to their chant three angelic others whose bearing spoke of a higher more exalted order. “Turn Beatrice!” they sang “Turn your holy eyes and look on your faithful one come so far that he might gaze on you. Out of your grace grant us this grace. Reveal your lips. Let him know the second beauty you have concealed.”

O splendour of the living light eternal who that has grown pale in Parnassus’s shade or drunk deeply of its mountain waters would not appear confounded in his mind in trying to render you in all your worth with your face unveiled, seen through the air while heaven’s harmony was your pale likeness.



S. BOU

H. PISAN

Canto XXXII



My gaze was so intent my eyes so fixed on finally quenching my tenure thirst that every other sense sped. My eyes were walled in on either side by indifference to all else. Her holy smile made me its own drawing me like a net. Suddenly though my gaze was forced to turn aside, left, where the three goddesses stood. “He stares too hard” I heard them murmuring. And that affliction of the eyes brought by peering into the force of the Sun left me for a time without my vision. But when my sight became accustomed to lesser sensation lesser compared to that from which I had to turn away I saw the glorious host had wheeled round to its right and turned to the East with the seven flames and the sun in its face.

I, with Statius and the fair woman who had helped me to ford Lethe’s stream now moved with a wheel which made the inner arc, then slowly passed through the tall woods, empty, because of one who had believed the snake. Our steps were marked by angelic song. We had walked perhaps three bow-shot distance when Beatrice descended from the chariot.

“Adam!” I heard them all murmuring then they drew up in a circle around a tree. Every branch was stripped of leaves and flowers. The higher it rose the ore it spread out, a wonder even in India’s woods. I did not recognise the hymn they sang then, it is not sung on earth nor, drowsy, could I hear its notes through to the finish. If I could describe how those pitiless eyes fell asleep hearing the tale of Syrinx, eyes whose watchful power cost them dear like a painter painting from a model, I could depict how I fell fast asleep. But let one who has more skill paint the

drowsiness. I shall tell of how I awoke from sleep when splendour rent the drowsy veil and a voice called to me “Rise! What are you doing?” So I woke and so standing over me she who from compassion guided my steps along the bank of the river before bewildered I asked “Where is Beatrice?”.

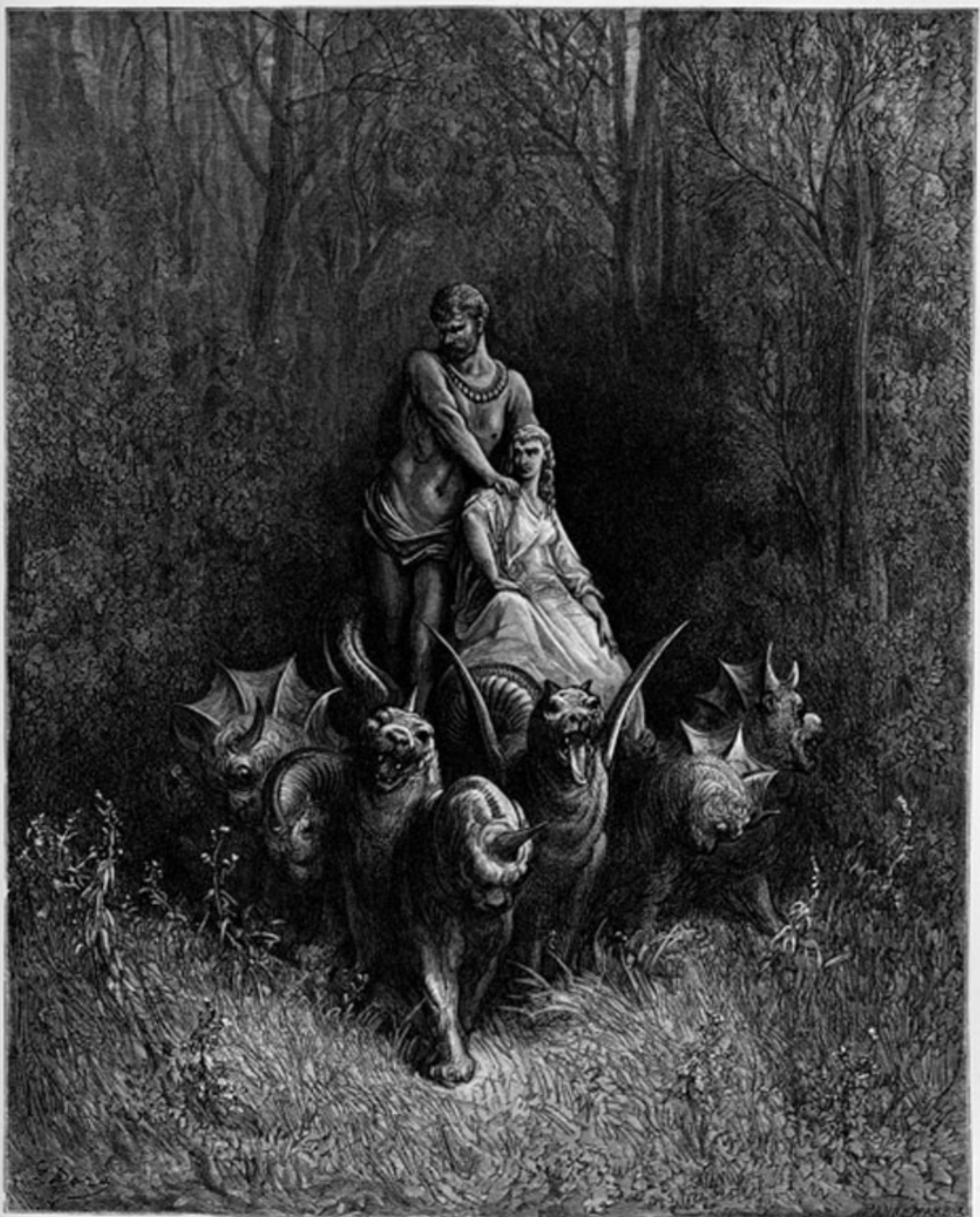
“Seated beneath the new leaves of that tree on its roots see the company she keeps. The rest behind the Griffin go higher on to deeper strains and sweeter music.” I do not know if she said more than that because I was allowed the sight again of She who excluded all other things.

Sat alone on the bare ground as if she were the guardian of the chariot bound to the tree by the two natured beast she was encircled by the seven nymphs like a garland who held lamps in their hands, no wind on earth could ever extinguish.

“You shall be a visitor here a while. Then you shall live with me. Time without end. Citizen of that Rome where Christ is Roman. Now for the good of sinners in your world watch the chariot closely and write down what you see.” said Beatrice addressing me. Devoutly at the feet of her commands I sat and set mind and eyes where She asked.

Never has lightning fallen through dense cloud, hurtling down from the most distant heaven’s limit as did that bird of Jove I saw swoop through the tree tearing at the bark as

well as destroying new leaves and blooms. It struck the chariot with all its force and made it stagger like a storm tossed ship battered by waves now from starboard now port. Then a fox left into the triumphal chariot, a she-fox so thin it seemed the food it fed on lacked all nourishment. My lady rebuked it for its squalid sins and forced it to fly quick as its stripped bones permitted it. The eagle plunged again down through the tree on to the chariot leaving it feathered with its plumage and just like grief dripping from a broken heart a voice was heard from heaven "How evil, my little ship, is the cargo you bear." Then the ground fissured beneath the two wheels. A dragon emerged from the open earth to drive its tale through the chariot floor and as a wasp withdraws its sting withdrew its poisoned tale ripping part of the floor and then went on its undulating way. Thus changed the holy chariot began to sprout heads. Three grew up on the pole and one grew from each of the four corners. The three were horned like oxen but the four had but a single horn upon their heads. A monster such as never seen before. Then there appeared seated as securely as a fort on a hill an ungirt whore casting roving sluttish glances around her and standing at her side was a giant who seemed to serve as her custodian. They would kiss each other from time to time but when she turned her wandering lustful eyes on me that ferocious lover beat her from head to foot, filled with suspicion and fierce with anger he untied the strange beast, dragging it into the wood where the trees hid both the master and the whore from view.



Canto XXIII

Tearful, the nymphs gently began to sing ““Deus venerunt gentes,” with three voices first, alternating, then with four and Beatrice sighing and full of pity listened, her face showing little less grief than Mary when she grieved beneath the cross. But then the other virgins had finished and bid her reply she stood upright then and glowing like an ardent flame announced “Modicum, et non videbitis me; Et iterum, sisters beloved of mine, a little while and you shall not see me.”

Then she set the seven nymphs before her and with just a nod signalled that I with a lady and a sage should move behind. She advanced and had not gone ten steps when she looked be serenely in the eyes. “Pray!” She said “Make more haste so you can be close and listen if I wish to speak to you.” I did as I was told. “Brother,” She asked when I was nearer “Why not question me?”

Like those who are too reverent to speech before their superiors and cannot drag up a clear voice as far as their teeth so I could make only a strangled noise when I began. “My Lady, of my need to know you are aware and aware too of how your knowledge can satisfy it.”

“Free yourself from fear and shame” She said then “ and ceased speaking like someone in a dream. Note what I say. You will repeat my words to those whose life is but a race to death and when you write them take heed not to hide the vision of the tree now twice pillaged on this spot. Who

robs or tears that tree sins against God by his blaspheming deed for He made it holy for His sole use. Because the first soul tasted of this tree he earned more than five thousand years of pain waiting for him who paid the penalty. Your mind sleeps if it cannot see the special reason why it grows so high and what makes its summit grow inverted and if like the waters of the Elsa vain thoughts did not encrust your mind, if you had joined them, were not like Pyramus staining the mulberry then you would know from the trees form and height the moral sense God's justice had forbidding trespass. But since I see your mind is made of rock and like a rock is opaque so my words and their clear light only leave you dazzled. My wish is you bear my words back with you. If yet unwritten at least in outline as the pilgrim's staff comes back reeved by palms."

And I said "As wax impressed by the seal does not alter the form its printed on, so my brain now bears the stamp of what you say. But why must your desired words ascend so high above my understanding that the more I try the less I seem to know?"

"So that you may recognize" She said "the school which you once followed if what its doctrine taught can comprehend what I have spoken and see that the earth is as far away from the highest and the swiftest heaven as your ways distant from the Divine."

I replied to that "But I do not recall that I made myself a strange rot you. My conscience doe snot accuse me there."

“If you cannot recall that” she said smiling “perhaps you can remember how today you drank of Lethe’s stream as smoke is proof of fire. Then it is clear that in your will there was a fault. A sin you now forget. But now the words I speak shall go bare as they have to be for your feeble sight.”

Glowing brighter and moving slower now, the sun was tracing its meridian which varies as seen from around the world when those seven ladies halted just as someone serving as escort for a group halts if he comes on a strange sight. Or even an unusual sign. They stopped at the edge of a pale shadow such as mountains cast on cool stream beneath foliage and dark branches. In front of them issuing from one spring I seemed to see Euphrates and Tigirs together then like close friends parting slowly. “O light, O glory of the human race! What water is this pouring from one source that flowing on divides from itself?” Her answer “Ask Matilda to explain.” At which the lovely lad spoke as though she felt the need to free herself from blame. “This I have already made clear to him and other matters. I am sure Lethe has not obscured his memory of this.”

“Perhaps some greater trouble weighs on his memory impeding his mind and obscuring the sight of his mind’s eye. But there flows Eunoe, lead him to it and revive the powers grown faint in him.”

As a gentle soul without a protest submits her will to others once a sign has made it known so fair Matilda

moved forward with me and courtesy addressing Statius said “Come with him.”

Now had I more space here I would sing in part at least of that sweet draft for which my thirst was limitless but since the Lion’s ordain for this the second canticle are done I am curbed by the bridle of my heart. From those most holy waves I emerged renewed like a tree reborn with fresh leaves made pure and ready to reach for the stars.

